

S E R M O N S
ON THE
DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

BY

R

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M D C C X C I I .

S E R M O N S

ON THE

DIVINITY OF CHRIST



P R E F A C E.

IT may be expected, that some reason should be assigned for publishing the following Sermons, upon a subject which hath already received so much discussion. And, indeed, were the merits of the performance the only recommendation, it is more than probable, the work itself would never have been brought forth to public view. But this, however, is the smallest consideration for its appearance.

The Sermons were composed for the particular edification of those persons in whose spiritual concerns the Author considers

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himself highly interested, and who are justly entitled to his best and most diligent labours. And his sole object was to prevent the minds of his congregation from being led away from what he humbly conceives to be the pure faith of the Gospel, by the revival of an opinion long since exploded, but which seems to be mingling with the fashionable doctrines of the present day.

As this purpose might have been sufficiently answered from the pulpit, the Author would have rested satisfied with the consciousness of having discharged, by that means, his duty; and with having given his public testimony, however trifling, to the important cause. But
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when he found the sincerity of the Established Clergy called in question; and it was confidently said, that but few of them believed the doctrines they professed, he concluded that he ought not to confine his sentiments within the narrow limits of his own parish, but declare himself in a more public way, to be one of those *supposed* few, whose professions and convictions are happily blended.

Although he hath said this, in order to account for the publication of the following Sermons, he has not said it with a view to deprecate the severity of criticism, or to affect popularity. To assert the dignity of our blessed Master, the great founder of Christianity, is the indispensable

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dispensable duty of every faithful servant of Jesus, whatever inconveniences he may suffer in so just a cause. And God forbid, that any man who bears this solemn character, should recede from any apprehension, in speaking of *his* divinity upon *earth*, through whose intercession, the prayers of the faithful are offered in *heaven*. If he shrinks with fear, from what may be the result of this publication, it is not from the dread of criticism (the shafts of which, upon the present occasion, must lose their power to wound,) but his fear is, lest the cause he wishes to support, should suffer from the very imperfect manner in which he hath treated it.

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He hath only further to request, that the candid reader will make all proper allowances for the great length into which he has been unavoidably carried, in the induction of particulars, towards the accomplishment of the end intended. Did he write for the amusement of a light hour, he could not hope, that a subject in which there is so little variety, and such great sameness of argument, would procure many readers. But as the design is of a different nature, he trusts the infinite importance of it, will be a sufficient apology with those who read from better motives.

May a divine blessing attend the serious perusal ! And if these Discourses be found to contain any
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thing of a salutary tendency, either to confirm the faith of the believer, or to guide the uninformed, in his pursuit of truth, *may God in all things be glorified, through Jesus Christ.*

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S E R M O N I.

MATTHEW, xxii. 42.

What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?

THE religion of Jesus which we profess, demands our attention by every argument capable of interesting the human heart. The manner of its first introduction, the immense preparation which, through so many ages, preceded its establishment, its descent to us, sealed with the blood of apostles and martyrs, nay, even *God himself confirming the word with signs, and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghost* *, are circumstances so very

* Heb. ii. 4.

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striking,

striking, as seem to render it impossible for any man to suppose, that all this mighty apparatus was intended to refer to a matter, trifling in its nature, and of no material consequence whether neglected or despised. *If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven* *. But while we feel the full influence, and great importance, of the gospel, we cannot but be proportionably anxious to know the truth as it is in Jesus; that we may embrace *that faith*, and that faith only, *which was once delivered unto the saints* †. For, however pure the fountain from whence the word of God first issued, yet if it comes to us through tainted and corrupt channels, how shall we be assured that it hath not imbibed a portion of impurity?

It is a well-known truth, and cannot be dissimbled, that, from the very infancy of Christianity, errors crept into the church. The tares of infidelity and scepticism were

* Heb. xii. 25.

† Jude iii.

early sown with the good seed. They sprung up and appeared together, and *both* (as our blessed Lord himself predicted) *will grow together unto the harvest* *. But let not the faithful despond on this account. Tares are always to be discerned from good seed. Divine Providence hath a gracious design in every dispensation. *There must be heresies among you* (saith an Apostle) *that they which are approved may be made manifest among you* †. Even the errors of opinion, therefore, are not without their use in the present state of discipline, for they serve to ascertain, and prove the truth. And from this ordeal the gospel hath been always found to come forth, not only with more clearness, but also bringing with it increasing evidence of its divine authority.

Every age hath been distinguished by some peculiar mode of hostility against the principles of our holy faith. By open attack, and by insidious design, the false friend, and the professed foe, have alike

* Matth. xiii. 30.

† 1 Corinth. xi. 19.

aimed their blows to effect the ruin of the church. But we know who it is that hath said, *his church is founded on a rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail* *. The enemies who have come forward against Christianity, have only broken their arrows against its impenetrable shield, and, tired of the unequal combat, have withdrawn from the field in sullen silence.

It would, however, be in vain to expect that all opposition should cease. Providence permits the existence of error, perhaps with a view to accomplish some greater good. By this means the truth, when discovered, is placed on a more firm and sure foundation, and in the mean time it answers the necessary ends of trial to exercise the faith of the true believer.

Besides, while the corrupt passions of the human mind remain unreformed, there will be always some who will find an interest in opposing the pure system of morality contained in the gospel ; and while religion is

* Matth. xvi. 18.

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fought for by others, *through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, and not after Christ* *, the pride of reason will not easily bend to the humbleness and docility of little children, which is so necessary to the reception of those doctrines by which the Christian faith is peculiarly known. From both these causes, therefore, the religion of Jesus will be always sure to meet with opposition.

The controversy of the present hour seems to be particularly of this latter kind. Under the specious pretence that reason alone is competent to determine the measure of religious faith, a certain class of men (and in the garb of friends to Christianity too) have presumed to analyze the several parts of revelation by this standard, and have peremptorily rejected every thing beyond the power of reason to account for, as impossible to have proceeded from God †.

Thus

* Coloss. ii. 8.

† It is not a little presumptuous in those who are such advocates for the powers of reason, to draw the conclusion which is too generally done by them, as

Thus, with a rash and bold hand, they have torn from the gospel all the sacred mysteries of our holy faith, reduced the whole to a mere system of ethics, and de-

though the mysteries of the gospel were utterly repugnant to it. It is one thing surely to assert that reason alone is unequal to the discovery of such truths as the Christian religion hath revealed, and another to pronounce them inconsistent with each other. While reason acts subordinately to Revelation, and with a proper humility, and diffidence, examines the evidences of its doctrines, they are in harmony together, and both will be found to accord. "Let reason be kept to, (says the admirable author of the *Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed*,) and if any part of the Scripture account of the redemption of the world by Christ, can be shewn to be really contrary to it, let the Scripture, in the name of God, be given up. But let not such poor creatures as we, go on objecting to an infinite scheme, that we do not see the necessity or usefulness of all its parts, and call this reasoning." See *Butler's Analogy*. Would any one wish to be informed of the extent of human reason, particularly in matters relating to religion, I would refer him to a most excellent sermon on this subject, by the late Bishop of London, Dr. Sherlock, Vol. I. Discourse I. in which, with an energy peculiar to that great writer, he hath shewn the miserable deficiency of this principle unassisted by the gospel as the guide of religious life.

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graded the divine Author of our salvation to a character no higher than that of a moral teacher; the equal of Socrates or Confucius. Nay, to such an height hath this doctrine advanced, that he who hath the dangerous honour of pre-eminence in this opinion hath declared, that the sentiments even of an Apostle are invalid, and of no weight with him *.

* Dr. Priestly, in his History of the early Opinions concerning Christianity, thus expresses himself: "As it is not pretended that there are any miracles adapted to prove that Christ made the world, I do not see that we are under any obligation to believe it merely because it was an opinion held by an Apostle," p. 68. vol. i. And again, page 70. "It is not certainly from a few casual expressions, which so easily admit of other interpretations, and especially in epistolary writings, that we can be authorised to infer that such was the serious opinions of the apostles. But if it had been their real opinion, it would not follow that it was true, unless the teaching of it should appear to be included in their general commission." And the same writer, in his Letter to Dr. H. part i. page 132. says, "I have frequently declared myself not to be a believer in the inspiration of the Evangelists and Apostles, as writers."

When errors of this fatal tendency spring up in the world, and come forth to the public under the sanction of distinguished names, we cannot be too much upon our guard to repel the seducing influence. The divinity of Jesus, I conceive to be the chief corner-stone in the edifice of Christianity. Remove this from the building and the whole fabric immediately totters. The foundation is shaken to the very centre. There appears at once an evident disproportion between the end and the means, the importance of the object proposed, and the person by whom it was accomplished. And then the great doctrine of atonement and expiation, by the blood of its Author, falls to the ground, and all the rich promises of the gospel are done away.

In matters of less moment, though we cannot but lament that there should be any dissensions amongst sincere professors of Christianity, yet when these refer to points of mere form or ceremony, and concern
not

not the fundamentals of religion, it were a folly to contend. They arise from the weaknesses and prejudices of human nature, and are the result of that imperfection and frailty, which mark our very best performances. But when so vital a part of the gospel is attacked, the divinity of our blessed Lord palpably denied, himself classed among fallible men, all adoration to him expressly forbidden, and the members of the established church branded with idolatry; it is impossible to regard such reproaches with indifference. How can any true believer hear, with unconcern, that blessed person, by whose sacred name we are called, thus degraded and traduced? Surely it must be a duty to come forward, and with becoming confidence assert the dignity of that Master under whose banner we serve, and the purity of that form of worship which we profess. Against assaults of this nature it can be no bigotry to remonstrate, nor will the just defence of our principles be deemed, by any liberal mind, an ill-timed zeal. Nay, our silence might rather be construed

strued into a tacit acknowledgment that we thought the charge unanswerable, and therefore meanly took refuge under an establishment which we were unable to defend.

But though gratitude, duty, and all the important interests of religion, demand this from us, and to remain supine, and indifferent, would be unpardonably criminal, yet, in opposing the opinion, we never oppose the person of men. *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ**. In the investigation of truth, every sincere friend to the gospel must wish, that all enquiries may be pursued, not only with Christian temper and candor, but with somewhat more than these, with affection and good will. It is not for the triumph of opinion we contend, but for truth. Our most earnest desires are, that *all may come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved†*. While anxious therefore,

* 2 Corinth. x. 4, 5.

† 1 Timothy ii. 4.

in the pursuit of this great point, we condemn no man for his religious principles. *To his own master he standeth or falleth* *. Too conscious of our own manifold imperfections, we dare not be rigorous and unmerciful to the imperfections of others. And surrounded as we are with so much darkness in the present state of being, that we can hardly judge of the objects which are near us with any precision or certainty, we are well aware how little the wisest of us know of the nature and dispensations of God. It were to be wished that all parties and persuasions of Christians would duly consider this circumstance, that every one might *learn to think humbly of himself, and as he ought to think*. But what a comfortable and encouraging relief to the mind is that gracious promise of Scripture; that if we put ourselves under the blessed direction of the great Spirit of truth, *he will guide us into all truth* †. If we *trust in the Lord, and lean not upon our own understanding, but in*

* Romans xiv. 4.

† John xiv. 13.

all our ways acknowledge him, he will direct our paths *. For the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant †.

With these objects in view, and under an humble hope of divine assistance, it is my intention, in this and a few following discourses, to examine the evidences of our Lord's divinity. The question is exceedingly interesting, and the event important. For if it can be proved that the testimony of Scripture is against this doctrine; it will follow, that the faith we profess, and the form of worship we observe, are founded on wrong principles; and all the venerable sanction of names, or the zeal of pious reformers, will be utterly insufficient to justify our continuance in them. But should it appear from the strictest investigation, that this great article of our church arises immediately from the Scriptures themselves, and derives its influence wholly from this supreme authority, we have only to pity and pray

* Proverbs iii. 5, 6.

† Psalms xxv. 13.

for the conversion of those who differ from us. Their objections, instead of injuring our cause, will have proved beneficial to it, by enabling us to shew that *our faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God* *.

In the prosecution of this design, it will be my duty to bring before you the evidences we are in possession of, to prove the divinity of Jesus. It will be yours to examine the same with carefulness and impartiality. And as our salvation is blended together, and rests upon the same common cause, you will give credit at least to my integrity, if not to my understanding. I should be utterly unworthy the sacred office I hold among you, were I capable of temporizing upon so awful a concern. I scruple not therefore to say, I have received myself the belief of this great doctrine with the fullest conviction. It is the faith in which I trust, under the divine grace, always to live, and in which I hope to die. But,

* 1 Corinth. ii. 5.

while anxious to discharge what appears to be only my duty, in placing this great principle of the gospel before you, upon its proper basis, I desire no one implicitly to follow my opinion. Upon so momentous a concern, every man, as far as he is able, should judge for himself. Like the Bereans, who are mentioned in sacred history with such honourable testimony, I would wish you to *search the scriptures daily whether these things are so**. Happy is that Christian whose experience in divine truths confirms the doctrines there revealed! *Who* (as the Apostle says) *from believing on the Son of God hath the witness in himself*†. If religion be at all important, it must be highly important; indifference is unpardonable; inattention something worse than folly. It is certainly the duty of every individual to be able to satisfy his own mind at least, if not to give an answer to others, of the hope that is in him: and that man must be strangely lost to all the great objects of eter-

* Acts xvii. 11.

† 1 John v. 10.

nity, who can sit down regardless in a matter of such infinite consequence, and which so highly concerns the salvation of his soul. Bend with me, I beseech you, before the awful throne of God, and let us humbly implore assistance from above, that the attention to this solemn subject, both of him who speaks and those who hear, may be rewarded with his grace. *That God may give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. The eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the hope of our calling *, that we may approve things that are excellent, and that we may be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ †.*

And here before I open the evidences in support of our blessed Lord's divinity, I beg once for all to premise, that I shall draw no conclusions in favour of this doctrine but from Scripture; for on all disputable points in religion, this certainly is the only unerring standard of our judgment. I am free

* Ephes. i. 18, 19.

† Phillip. i. 10.

to confess that the whole body of commentators are nothing decisive with me on this important point. Whoever implicitly follows the opinions of men may be deceived. From the pure and uncorrupt word of God, there can be no danger of error or delusion. It is to this authority only I bend: and I trust you will find nothing in the course of these sermons insisted upon with the smallest emphasis, but what can clearly be proved from the testimony of Scripture *.

It

* Dr. Priestly, in his History of the Corruptions of Christianity, hath laboured much to shew that the opinions of the early Christians were against the divinity of our Lord. The present Bishop of St. David's hath gone over the same ground, in order to prove the contrary. But with all due deference to these great writers, I cannot conceive it makes any thing in point for, or against, the question. It is the unalterable doctrine of Scripture, and not the divided, and uncertain opinion of the first Fathers, that is to be the guide of our faith. Admitting all that Dr. Priestly wishes to have believed, that the early Christians were not orthodox in this matter, it does not follow that they were taught this system of faith by the Apostles; nay, if it appears (as I think cannot be doubted) that the Apostles themselves were believers
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It will be unnecessary to produce any evidence of the authenticity of the sacred books themselves. The hardiest champions of infidelity have never yet attempted to disprove the marks of genuine truth and purity with which these records are transmitted to us. Were these discourses, indeed, levelled against the controversial writings of deists, it might be needful to take a

in our Lord's divinity, the corruptions of the succeeding ages of the church are not of the smallest avail. It is at the best, but leaving the direct path of information, and going aside into bye-ways in search of it, when we turn from the testimony of Scripture to enquire what were the sentiments of the primitive fathers. It may gratify our curiosity, but ought to have no influence upon our faith. A single page in the word of God, which clearly, and unequivocally, proves the divinity of Jesus to be the sense of Scripture, and that it was the creed of the Apostles, is all that we are interested to regard. At the same time, it is but justice to add, the Bishop of St. David's hath very clearly proved, by quotations from the writings of the early Christians, that they did not deny this important article of our faith. And the learned world is certainly very highly indebted to him for refuting the assertions of Dr. Priestly on this head.

See Horsley's Tracts in Controversy with Dr. Priestly.

larger circuit, and to shew the authority on which they rest. But as my present design is of another nature, and intended only to prevent your minds from being led away by an opinion injurious to Christianity, and advanced by Christians themselves, who acknowledge with us the writings of the New Testament to be genuine, it is not necessary, upon this occasion, to bring forward any evidence in their support. Taking it for granted, therefore, that the sacred volume is admitted to be authentic, I shall immediately proceed to bring before you that great body of evidence with which the Scriptures abound, to prove the divinity of our blessed Master; and that Jesus is, in the fullest sense of the expression, the Son of the Most High God.

The words of the text which I have thought to be most pertinent to the purpose of opening the subject on the divinity of Christ, are not a little demonstrative of the great point in question.

Our blessed Lord had been interrogated by the Pharisees and Sadducees, (and it should

should seem not with the most friendly design,) upon certain matters of opinion peculiar to each sect. After this conference, Jesus himself proposed to them the question in the text: *What think ye of Christ, whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David: he saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord? saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right-hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?* Let any man of plain common understanding read this passage as it stands in the New Testament, and then determine for himself; will it not instantly strike him, that our blessed Lord meant to infer, that somewhat above the nature of an human being was appointed to distinguish the character of the Messiah? That, notwithstanding Christ, according to the flesh, was to spring from the seed of David, yet, at the same time, by his superior nature, he was to be David's Lord? That our Saviour's argument was considered in this light by his hearers, and that it

wrought a conviction of this kind upon their minds, seems highly probable; for the Evangelist adds, *They were not able to answer him a word, neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask him any more questions.*

But, passing by this argument in favour of our cause, I lay no stress upon it. It is the question only in the text which I wish to make use of as the basis of this discourse: *What think ye of Christ, whose son is he?* Is he, according to the opinion of our modern Unitarians, simply no other than a man, or, agreeable to the doctrine of the established church, is he the Son of God? This is the great and interesting question to be discussed in the prosecution of this subject. And my sincere prayers to God are, that, void of all party-persuasion, and unbiassed by the smallest prejudice, our researches may be directed by the influence of that blessed Spirit of truth, *which may guide us into all truth.*

To a mind perfectly free from prepossession, and open to conviction, the numberless

less passages we meet with in Scripture which fully and unequivocally declare Christ to be the Son of God, might, one would think, decidedly prove his divinity. For such a distinguished and peculiar appellation cannot, with the smallest shadow of reason, be applied to him, unless his pretensions to the relationship it includes be also admitted.

A writer of eminence, however*, considers our blessed Lord in a higher degree of dignity

* Dr. Price, in his Sermons on what he calls the Christian Doctrine, page 110. says, "As one who wishes to be a candid enquirer after truth, I must here tell you, that I think the mere appellation (Son of God) applied to Christ, decides nothing on this subject. The manner in which he is so styled implies his pre-eminence as a prophet and messenger from God; but the appellation, taken by itself, and abstracted from the circumstances of its application, affords no proof of his being more than man." In the same Sermon, page 127. the Doctor, after having enumerated some of the stupendous events which distinguished our Saviour's life, and the wonders of his death, concludes the observations with saying, "Never was a character so august exhibited on the stage of this world; and, when I contemplate it in

dignity than any prophet, or messenger of God who preceded him, but yet conceives that nothing valid to the argument can be derived from this phrase of *Son of God*, with which Christ is every where distinguished in the sacred writings. And, among other reasons, he assigns, that this title is sometimes given also in Scripture to angels *, to magistrates †, and even good Christians ‡. It is wonderful that men of the most penetrating abilities should not immediately perceive the very dissimilar circumstances under which this appellation is used when applied

all its circumstances, I am disposed to cry out, in language similar to that of the Roman centurion, who attended his crucifixion, *Surely, this was a superior being.*"

* In the book of Job, chap. xxxviii. ver. 7. it is said, *The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*

† In the book of Psalms, lxxxii. 6. *I have said, Ye are gods, and ye are all the children of the Most High.*

‡ *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*, Rom. viii. 14. And again, the Apostle John says, *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God. Now are we the sons of God,* 1 John iii. 2.

to men, and when spoken of him who is said not only to be *the Son of God*, but *the express image of his person* *. They who are so ready to class our Lord's pretensions to this title with those of the general mass of eminent persons to whom it is sometimes given, would be at a loss, I believe, to explain, upon the same principles, in what sense we are to understand the term when it is connected with the most expressive phrases; such as, *the only begotten Son of God, who was in the bosom of the Father; the beloved Son of God, and dear Son of God, the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature* †. There must be something surely peculiar in those instances, and different from the common acceptation of the phrase when conferred by way of eminence on particular persons or characters ‡? But,
 added

* Hebrews i. 3.

† See John i. 14—18. Matthew iii. 17. Mark ix. 7. Luke ix. 35. Colossians i. 13—15, &c.

‡ Dr. Price accounts for some of those expressions in this manner: "It deserves your notice (he says), that Christ is styled God's first begotten, as well as his only

added to these striking particularities, there are other corroborating circumstances which appear to me to put the matter beyond all doubt, and which I shall much wonder if the most extravagant latitude of construction can possibly do away.

If I can prove to your satisfaction that this distinguished title by which Christ is every where, in the New Testament, called (the Son of God), was not applied to him merely by his followers, but was the individual character by which his commission and authority were to be made known; that it was first declared by the angel in his address to Mary at the annunciation; afterwards assumed by our Lord himself at his entrance upon his public office; received

begotten Son; and that he is so styled plainly for no other reason, than that he was the first that rose from the dead." But a little after, page 116, the Doctor says, "That Christ is called the Son of God, on three accounts, in the New Testament: first, on account of his miraculous conception; secondly, on account of his resurrection; thirdly, on account of his office as the Messiah."

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the testimony of a voice from heaven in confirmation of its truth, more than once, during our Lord's exercise of his ministry; and that even the spirits of darkness gave the same evidence to it: in short, that this title uniformly characterized his person while he continued upon earth, and is the distinguishing name by which the apostles and inspired writers have revealed his doctrines to all the ages of the church; and that these facts do not depend upon a single passage of a questionable sense or meaning, but that one invariable strain of testimony runs through the whole volume of Scripture: If I say I can shew this, I should hope it would be conclusive and satisfactory to every candid person. Permit me therefore to bring before you the several testimonies of this kind, by which this leading proof of Christ's divinity is confirmed and assured*.

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* There is no end to concession in religious disputes, or I should, without much hesitation, relinquish all that may be made of this argument in favour of our Lord's divinity. It is hardly worth while to stand contending on questionable

The first instance is that of the Angel in his salutation of Mary. *The Holy Ghost*

questionable ground, when we have so large a field to go over full of evidences, which I venture to consider, perfectly incontrovertible. But concessions are dangerous things. Every passage of Scripture that carries with it too plain a sense to be refuted, is palliated by some argument of sophistry. And if this cannot be done, it is sure to be either passed by, or reduced to a figurative meaning. Dr. Priestly, indeed, uses more candor and openness; for, when an Apostle speaks in a language incapable of being misunderstood, the Dr. very freely declares it to be *the inconclusive reasoning of an Apostle*. See his History of the Corruptions of Christianity, vol. ii. page 370. So, again, when the Apostle John said, Christ is come in the flesh, 1 John iv. 2. the Dr. takes the liberty to make this very material alteration, and says, that the Apostle meant to say, Christ is come of the flesh, although it is plain and evident, that in the original the preposition made use of is *ex*. See the same vol. p. 10. See also 1 John iv. 3. When Faustus Socinus found it necessary, in order to support his doctrine, to invalidate that passage of our blessed Lord, in which he says, *No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven*, John iii. 13. He says, he supposes that Christ, after his baptism, and before his entrance upon his ministry, was taken up into heaven, in order to receive power for the work. Thus reducing

*Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; THEREFORE that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God **.

Now here is an exprefs and positive reason assigned why Jesus is called the Son of God. From *the Holy Ghost coming upon Mary,* and *the power of the Highest overshadowing her*; by which our blessed Lord deriving his existence in the flesh from a Divine Power, and without the intervention of an human father, he was truly and properly called the Son of God. A circumstance evidently peculiar to Christ, and by which the title becomes applicable only to him. Had the conception not been miraculous, but the natural consequence of Mary's marriage with her husband, there could have been no reason given for this appella-

cing our Lord to the necessity of an expedient, not much unlike the Mesra of Mahomet. Such miserable subterfuges are great men obliged to have recourse to, in order to carry them through with their opinion, when that opinion is found to militate against the plain sense of Scripture.

* Luke i. 35.

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tion. There is something also very remarkable in the Angel's expression; he does not say in consequence of this overshadowing power of the Highest, *the child* shall be called the Son of God, but (*το αγιον*) *the holy*, thereby drawing a striking distinction between the word made flesh, and the highest created being whatever.

The second proof I shall bring of Christ's exclusive claim to this title personally considered, is the testimony of a voice from heaven, both at his baptism, and again at his transfiguration. *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* *. This, also, I conceive to be another very striking discrimination between the ordinary custom observable among men, whereby eminent persons may be distinguished by eminent titles, and the authority of a voice from heaven, giving so extraordinary a demonstration of the dignity of him to whom it was applied. If it can be any where shewn, and, in any one instance, that any indivi-

* Matthew iii. 17.—xviii. 5, &c. Luke ix. 35. Mark ix.

dual among the sons of men, ever received such a testimony from above, then this of Jesus at his baptism and transfiguration, will by so much be lessened upon a comparison in its importance: but if not, it plainly follows, that there must have been something peculiar in *his* person and character, from his receiving such supernatural attestations of his dignity and consequence. And we may venture to ask, in the words of the Apostle, *Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee* *?

But, thirdly, we have other testimony beside that of the Angel, and a voice from above, for the spirits of darkness brought their unwilling evidence to the same great truth. Read only the latter part of the fourth chapter of the Gospel by St. Luke, and then determine on what ground it is that Christ is called the Son of God. *And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and he cried with*

* Hebrews i. 5.

a loud voice, saying, Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth; art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And devils also came out of many, crying out and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak for they knew that he was Christ *. What over-powering evidences are these collectively considered, that the appellation of this title given to Christ is peculiar and appropriate! How any man can possibly withhold his assent to the divinity of Jesus, when even apostate spirits cannot refrain, is unaccountable and surprising!

When we add to these strong testimonies, the further assurance that our blessed Lord assumed this title himself, and founded his mission expressly upon it, because he was the Son of God; this at once determines the whole, by clearly shewing, that it is on his own declarations we are authorized to apply this sacred appellation to

* Luke vi. 41. Mark v.

him;

him; and from hence we have reason also to infer, that the expression carries with it all the idea that we can entertain of a divine and eternal nature. It would be tedious to particularize every instance we meet with in the history of our blessed Lord of this kind. Let a few passages suffice.

Christ had healed a cripple on the Sabbath-day, for which the Jews sought to slay him; but Jesus answered them, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*; therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because *he not only had broken the Sabbath, but had said also, that God was his Father, making himself equal with God**. A most positive proof this, that our blessed Lord assumed this title, and that the Jews understood it in the light of a claim, and for which they were so exceedingly exasperated against him.

Sometime after this, in a conference which Christ held with the Jews, in which he declared his unity with the Father, *I*

* Johh v. 17, 18.

and my Father are one, they took up stones again to stone him; but Jesus demanded the cause for which they did it; they replied, for blasphemy, because that thou *being a man makest thyself God**. Can any thing be more in point than this?

Again, upon a similar occasion, when Christ had opened the eyes of one that was born blind, and much altercation and dispute arose between the Jews and the man in consequence of it, which terminated in putting him out of the synagogue, our blessed Lord met his patient, and proposed to him this very question, *Dost thou believe on the Son of God?* He answered and said, *Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?* And Jesus said, *Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him*†. Here is an evidence the most express, plain, and positive, that can be, and attended also with the divine adoration of Jesus. Would Christ have assumed this title,

* John x. 30.

† John ix. 35.

and accepted homage and worship by virtue of it, had not both been his just right? Would not this meek and humble Saviour rather have corrected the errors of the man, and availed himself of so good an opportunity of renouncing such a title, and in-joining the worship of God only, had not his divinity been unquestionable, and his relationship to the Father fully clear and indisputable? Judge then on what dangerous ground those men tread, who step forward with so much confidence to rob the Son of God of his due, and endeavour to degrade the eternal Son of the Father, to the condition of a poor being like ourselves! What a different opinion the Apostle Peter had of his Master's real character, and what sentiments he entertained of our Lord's claim to this title, may easily be gathered from the expressions he made use of in his way to Cæsarea Philippi. When Christ, in order to try their faith in him, proposed to his disciples this question, *Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?* They said, *some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and*
D *others,*

others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. And when Christ desired to know what they thought of him, Peter, with his usual promptness, immediately cried out, Thou art Christ the Son of the living God. Can any man suppose that this was said complimentary only? That Peter should say to a man like himself, Thou art Christ the Son of the living God. Is it possible any one can adopt such an opinion? and especially when it procured for him that glorious commendation, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. So far indeed was this from being a common compliment, used in courtesy to distinguished men, that Christ declared it to be a truth of that superlative nature, that human discernment was unequal to the discovery of it, and it could only be revealed by the supreme Father. The same divine truth, it may justly be said, operates in the present hour. The natural man receiv-*

* Matthew xvi. 13.

eth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discern-ed.*

I shall mention only one passage more, in confirmation of our Lord's assumption of this title; and that is the instance at his trial, when the high-priest demanded of Jesus, by a solemn adjuration, to tell him *whether he was the Christ the Son of God †?* or as the equivalent phrase of another Evangelist expresses it, *Art thou the Christ the Son of the blessed ‡?* And on our Lord's declaring that he was, the high-priest rent his cloaths, saying, he had spoken blasphemy. Would he have pronounced this blasphemy, if it had been considered as nothing more than a usual complimentary title given to remarkable characters *ex officio*? Much less would he have declared Jesus deserving of death in consequence of it? Is it not self-evident, that the Jews considered the expression in the full sense

* 1 Corinth. ii. 14.
xiv. 61.

† Luke xxii. 70

‡ Mark

36 S E R M O N I.

and acceptation of the word, and which of consequence became blasphemy, if improperly assumed? And is it not equally clear that Christ laid down his life in support of his just pretensions to this title?

Such repeated proofs of the point in question, leave no room to doubt in what sense we are to consider Christ's assumption of this character, and what ideas we are to annex to this distinguishing appellation. It must be plain to every candid and unprejudiced mind, that the term made use of, when applied to the person of Jesus, differs most essentially when used in compliment to any other among the sons of men. And if we have authority to draw any inference from any one fact in the world, we may with the fullest safety conclude, from those instances, that our blessed Lord is, in the highest and most complete sense of the word, *the Son of God*. Here the reasoning of the Apostle is strictly applicable; *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater,*

er, and this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.*

It were unnecessary for me to go further, and enumerate the several passages we meet with in Scripture, in which Christ is particularly distinguished by this title, among his Apostles and followers. After the review already taken, and especially our Lord's own testimony on this point, it would, I think, be superfluous †. Even what hath been

* John i. 5. 9.

† Though it were needless to multiply quotations, in support of the doctrine before us, yet, as some of the expressions with which Christ is particularized, under the character of *the Son of God*, are singularly striking, it may not be amiss to mention a few of them in a note. The Apostle Paul, when speaking of Christ, says, that *he was declared to be the Son of God with power*, Romans i. 4. plainly testifying, by this expression, what the Apostles sentiments were, that this appellation was not with Christ a barren title, but accompanied with that plenitude of authority which the relationship might be supposed to include; differing most essentially in every point when applied to any mere human character, and when spoken of him who came in all the power of the Highest.

The testimony of Nathaniel is to the same amount also;

been now advanced on this subject, I would wish to be considered only as collateral to the

also; for it was given upon our Lord's displaying proofs of his divine omniscience. *Rabbi* (says he) *thou art the Son of God*, John i. 49.

The Apostle Peter, upon a remarkable occasion, hath given us his repeated ideas of this title, *Lord, to whom shall we go* (says he) *thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ the Son of the living God*, John vi. 69.

Martha, in making profession of her faith, used these memorable words, *I believe* (says she) *that thou art the Christ the Son of God, which should come into the world*, John xi. 27.

And the Apostle John, in the conclusion of his gospel, tells us, that the works and miracles of Christ which he hath recorded, were written on purpose that ye might believe that *Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name*, John xx. 31. All which demonstrate most fully, that when Jesus is called *the Son of God*, it is in a very different sense from the meaning when applied to any other character. Philip the deacon, it is evident, considered it to be so when his Æthiopian convert made profession of his belief as a qualification for baptism; *I believe* (says he) *that Jesus is the Son of God*, Acts viii. 37. If this implied no more than a mere complimentary form, he might

the main body of evidence which I purpose to bring forward in discussing the important question of our Lord's divinity. I cannot but think, the several circumstances I have laid before you, respecting the phrase itself when applied to our Saviour, are very

might as well have professed his belief in any other remarkable character of Scripture.

From these and other passages of the like nature, which might, if needful, have been brought into the argument, nothing, I think, can be more plain, than that the Apostles, and first followers of Christianity, considered our Lord, in the fullest sense, the real and proper Son of God. And I must confess it is with astonishment, that I behold good men, who acknowledge the divine authority of Christ's mission, and yet disallow, at the same time, his claim to a divine character, which he evidently assumed. For surely it was incompatible with the pure and humble Spirit of Jesus, to have taken, or even permitted, such a title to have been applied to him, if all the while he was conscious he had no right or claim to it. Such notions would never have been cherished in his holy breast. But what an awful passage is that of the Apostle John to those who reject, *in toto*, all the evidences with which this truth is supported. *He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.* John i, 5. 10.

striking and particular; but they are not so essential to our cause as to oblige us to lay much stress upon them. The argument arising from hence, and much more, I think we might with safety give up, and yet retain enough to prove the doctrine I am anxious to confirm in your minds.

The divinity of Jesus is so conspicuous a feature in the Gospel, and is supported by evidences which press upon us so closely on every side, that, I flatter myself, there is not any one point of Christ's religion more capable of being clearly proved and ascertained, than his claim to a divine nature.

I should proceed immediately to the testimonies contained in Scripture of this great doctrine, but their importance demands a more full and particular discussion than your present attention will permit. I reserve them, therefore, for the subject of our next meeting. In the mean time, *consider what hath been said, and may the Lord give you a right understanding in all things,*

S E R M O N II.

JOHN xvii. 5.

The glory which I had with thee before the world was.

THE prominent features which discriminated the life of Jesus, when upon earth, from all other characters which have at any time appeared upon the stage of this world, will be placed in the most advantageous point of view, if we previously examine the evidences we have of his pre-existent state and dignity. These, no doubt, are the great criteria of his divinity, and can alone enable us to comprehend many of the august events which followed in his life. My chief object, therefore, will be to collect such accounts as we have of this doctrine in Scripture, and bring them before you,

you, together with the evidences of our Lord's character, as described by the sacred writers, which will tend, I hope, greatly to ascertain his pretensions to a divine nature.

It would swell the subject to an unusual length, and much exceed the limits allotted to addresses of this kind, were I to instance every passage in the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles which refer to this important point. I shall content myself, therefore, with selecting such only as are more immediately pertinent to my purpose, and of the plainest and most obvious meaning. Happy indeed is it for mankind, that many of them are self-evident, and require no explanation. The word of God, which is intended for common use, is adapted to common apprehension. And though it is written with all the marks of the most consummate wisdom, yet it wonderfully condescends, at the same time, to the humblest capacities, particularly in the great and essential points of knowledge, in which there is nothing but
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what the most uninformed mind is capable of receiving. Divine goodness in this, as well as many other instances, plainly shewing that however these things *may be hid from the wise and prudent, yet hath he revealed them unto babes* *. *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world (saith an Apostle) to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty* †.

Nothing can more strikingly prove this, than the several passages of Scripture which have a reference to our present argument. For example ; we see the most positive and express declaration of Christ's pre-existence and dignity in the words of the text. For when our blessed Lord says, *he had glory with the Father before the world was*, what possible conclusion can any man make of this, but that Christ had existence in glory with the Father before the world ? No sophistry or evasion can do away the very evident sense of the phrase. It is likely, many different opinions may

* Matthew xi. 25.

† Corinth. i. 27.

arise in the minds of different persons concerning the nature and degree of the glory here spoken of; and men fond of disputation and argument may spend much time in conjectures upon it: but if the words of Christ himself can be supposed to have any sense or meaning, his pre-existence and connection with God must be admitted. *He had glory with the Father before the world was.* Nor could so plain a passage of Scripture ever have been thought ambiguous, were it not that passing by the first and most obvious meaning, men suffer themselves to be led away in quest of something more mysterious than the plain sense naturally suggests*.

So

* I cannot forbear adding, by way of note, that the argument in favour of our Lord's pre-existence, is exceedingly strengthened from the consideration of the very familiar manner in which Christ occasionally speaks of the glories of heaven. The difference between our Lord and his Apostles (even after their inspiration) is in this particular very observable. They seem to be lost in the contemplation whenever they have occasion to describe the heavenly state, and appear

So again, when our blessed Lord, upon various occasions, expressed himself on this subject, and without a figure, in words like these; *I came down from heaven**, *I proceeded forth, and came from God†*. *Before Abraham was I am‡*. *No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven§*. And in a conference with the Jews he contrasted his nature and character with

to be oppressed with the weight of the subject; but with Jesus, nothing can seem to be more natural and familiar. "It is like a *prince* (says the pious author of the Family Expositor, vol. ii. page 467.) who, from having been educated in a splendid court, could speak with ease of many magnificent things, at the sudden view of which a *peasant* would be swallowed up in astonishment; and would find himself greatly embarrassed in an attempt to explain them to his equals at home."

Whoever compares the plain representations our blessed Lord hath given of heaven, with the laboured expressions of the Apostles upon this subject, will be struck with the justness of this observation, and no inconsiderable argument will arise therefrom, of our Lord's pre-existence in glory.

* John vi. 38.

† John viii. 42.

‡ John viii. 58.

§ John iii. 13.

theirs,

theirs, in language liable to no misconception ; *Ye are from beneath, I am from above. Ye are of this world, I am not of this world**. *What, and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before†.* What construction can any one possibly put upon these very plain phrases, that shall deprive them of their evident sense and meaning, *that Christ came down from heaven, and that he proceeded, and came forth from God†.*

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* John viii. 23.

† John viii. 62.

† Dr. Price, whose opinion cannot be supposed partial to the full extent of our Lord's divinity, hath nevertheless, with a candour that does him honour, in his illustrations of those passages of Scripture, expressed himself in such terms as very fully decide the sense in which he accepted them. " The Jews (he says) understood our Lord's expression, to be an intimation, that he had existed in heaven before he came into this world, and therefore murmured at him, and said, Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How is it then that he says, *I came down from heaven?* There is in this case, (says the Doctor) a presumption that the sense in which the Jews understood our Lord, was the most obvious and natural sense. If, however, it was not, and the

It must be, I conceive, departing most exceedingly wide from the point intended, to reduce them into mere figure and metaphor. That the Apostles of Christ accepted them in their literal sense is evident; for upon an occasion of this kind, when our blessed Lord was discoursing to them upon the subject, and expressed himself in much the same language, *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. Again I*

the Jews had perversely misinterpreted his words, it was reasonable to expect that he would have said something to correct their mistake. But instead of this, we find that, in his reply, he repeated the same declaration in stronger language, and intimated that they had understood him rightly, *Does this offend you? What, and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?*

A like observation may be made on the words in John viii. 18. Before Abraham was, I am. It is in this instance, also, a circumstance of some consequence, that these words were occasioned by an offence which Jesus had given the Jews by an expression which they thought implied, that he had existed in the days of Abraham. *Then said the Jews to him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus answered, Verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.* See Price's Sermons, page 132, 133.

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*leave the world and go to the Father**, his disciples acknowledged that Christ spake plainly, and spake not to them in proverbs; and they expressed their faith in this doctrine in terms which, one would have thought, might have been safely followed by all sincere professors of Christianity to the end of the world: *Now (say they) are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: By this we believe that thou camest forth from God†.*

Once more. When the Apostle John says, in one of his Epistles, *We know the Son of God is come*: and again, in his gospel, *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father*. In both these passages the meaning is liable to no misapprehension upon the supposition of Christ's eternal nature, but the whole is abundantly clear, intelligible, and not to be mistaken. But put this out of the question, how ridiculous and absurd would it be, to say, *the Son of God is come*, if Christ was not

* John xvi. 28

† John xvi. 30.

really and truly the Son of God, and did not possess an exclusive privilege to this title? or why should the Apostle particularize so plain and obvious a proposition, that *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, if our Lord was simply no other than an human being, and never existed before his birth from the Virgin Mary? How should a human being be otherwise made than in *flesh*? And who should he dwell with but with *men*? Above all, what possible claim could this man of flesh have to the dignity mentioned; the glory which was beheld in him as of *the only begotten of the Father*? Either I am greatly deceived, or there appears many absurdities and even contradictions which are difficult to reconcile with those phrases in the Unitarian creed! And yet it should seem, nothing can be more plain and evident than those passages of Scripture are, when read without prejudice, and accepted in their first and most obvious meaning.

And here I cannot help digressing one moment just to observe, how necessary it

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must be in all Christians who are sincerely desirous of coming to the knowledge of the truth, carefully to consult the sacred volume, in its pure, and uncorrupt state, and in its own beautiful simplicity and plainness, unaltered by commentators of any description. It was the commendation given to the Thessalonians by the Apostle Paul, that when *they received the word of God, they received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh in them that believe* *. Such, I conceive, should be the conduct of all that are in pursuit of information in the great points of religion. The Holy Scriptures are now (generally speaking) open to every one's inspection, and few persons, in the present enlightened day, but are capable of reading them. If these holy books were frequently made the study of a retired hour, they could not fail, under the divine blessing, of informing the mind in every thing needful. By placing ourselves under the direction of the Spirit of God, and

* 1 Thessalonians ii. 13.

imploring

imploring that grace which is liberally promised to all that seek it, we should adopt the best method of procuring that knowledge which *is able to make us wise unto salvation, through the faith which is in Christ Jesus. He would teach us all things, and guide us into all truth.*

But I proceed to the further selection of those passages of Scripture which more particularly point out the pre-existence and dignity of our blessed Lord.

Among the many evidences of this kind, the exordium of St. John's Gospel claims our first attention; for it is so much to our purpose, and confirms so decidedly this great article of our faith, that, if the authority of an inspired writer can be at all considered as conclusive, or satisfactory, we need no further quotation in proof of it. Either it establishes the fact itself by indisputable testimony, or must be considered as introducing the sacred contents which follow in his Gospel, by a falsehood, and contradiction in the very preface. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; the*

same was in the beginning with God *. This memorable passage, which so fully and circumstantially asserts the divinity of Jesus, (by ascribing to him such attributes as are only compatible with Deity,) hath been examined with the most nice and scrupulous criticism, from the days of the Apostles, to the present hour, in order to invalidate the

* We might borrow the words of the learned author before quoted, and say it would be the work of a treatise rather than a note, to represent the various readings which have been given to this passage of St. John, so as to suit the complexion of the different sectaries of Christians. If any one would wish to see the curious construction, and paraphrase of it, by those characters, I would refer him to the first Sermon of Waterland's Discourses on the Divinity of Christ, where the different readings of the different sectaries are faithfully related. "I am fully sensible (says Dr. Doddridge) of the sublime and mysterious nature of the doctrine of Christ's Deity, as here declared, and it is a matter of conscience with me thus strongly to declare my belief of it." See Family Expositor, quarto edition, vol. i. page 6.—Mr. Lindsay's Paraphrase of this passage, (in his address to the students of the university) notwithstanding the good sense of the author, is really too chimerical to be treated seriously.

meaning,

meaning, and to prove, if possible, that by the term *Word*, the sacred writer intended nothing personal. But all attempts of this kind must be insufficient. For when the Apostle so plainly declares, that the Word was not only in the beginning *with* God, but actually *was* God, surely nothing can be more decisive: for this would be utterly impossible without admitting a personality. And, as if to remove all objections, and that no doubt might remain concerning the true sense of the word, it is remarkable that the same Apostle, (who must be supposed the best commentator on himself,) uses the same expression in one of his Epistles, and there annexes such positive qualities to the term as fully decide the point in question. *That* (says he) *which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life.* Terms these highly expressive of person, and impossible to be accepted in any other sense. And observe how striking to the purpose what follows: *For the life* (says he) *was ma-*
E 3 *nifested,*

nifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us *. *That eternal life*; what a nervous expression! Which not only confirms the certainty of its being personal, but also proves, according to the Apostles ideas, the eternal nature of him to whom it belongs. Both which are well known to refer to our Lord Jesus Christ. So conclusive, and satisfactory are the writings of this beloved Apostle, in the very exordium both of his gospel and epistle, on this important doctrine. And were not facts against it, I should think it impossible that any one could open the Testament to these chapters, and read them with an unprejudiced mind, who would not close the book with the fullest conviction of the divinity of Jesus.

Again: the Apostle Paul exhorting the Corinthians to charity, makes use of the following remarkable passage: *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was*

* 1 John i. 1, 2.

rich,

rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich *. In this

* 2 Corinth. viii. 9. This passage, in my opinion, is no inconsiderable argument to prove, that the earliest Christians, and in the days of the Apostles themselves, were not, as Dr. Priestly supposes, unbelievers of our Lord's divinity, but orthodox in this great article of our faith. For the Apostle writes to the Corinthians with all the confidence of one who was mentioning, not a novel thing, but a truth long since received, and acknowledged. For had this point been at all questionable, or not fully credited, he surely would not have said, *Ye know* what they absolutely did not know, had never heard of before, or perhaps denied. A presumptive evidence at least this, that the Corinthians were believers in this important doctrine. And it appears to me, I confess, so clear, and decisive, that I only wonder the learned Bishop of St. David's, in his Controversy with Dr. Priestly on this subject, when producing the authority of Barnabas, to shew that there was one, at least of the early Christians, a believer in our Lord's divinity, had not quoted this passage also, to shew the great probability, to speak the least of it, that the Corinthians were of the same opinion: For I will venture to affirm, that it is impossible to reconcile the Apostle's expression in this passage even with common sense, upon any other terms than the supposition, that he was writing to a body of men who were believers in the divinity of Jesus. See Horsley's Tracts, letter viii. p. 163.

verse the Apostle plainly refers to a point which he assumes as a thing unquestionable, and which the Corinthians were not only informed of, but believed; namely, the previous dignity of Christ, to his appearance in the flesh. For otherwise the expression is unwarrantable, and false. Christ we know was born and bred in the humblest poverty, and from the first hour of his entrance into the world, to his departure out of it, respecting worldly circumstances, was most poor, and wretched indeed: how then could the Apostle call him rich? It is, therefore, clear that he alludes to that glory which Christ himself tells us he had with the Father before the world was, and which he put off when he came upon earth, And it is still more worthy your observation, that the Apostle refers this to the consideration of the Corinthians, not as a new matter, which they had never heard of before, or was at all questioned, or disputed among them, but as a fact with which they were all well acquainted, and which no man denied; *ye know*

know (says he) the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c.

Once more: the same Apostle, in his Epistle to the Philippians, hath a passage equally demonstrative of this doctrine. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* *. I am perfectly aware what a variety of constructions has been put upon this memorable passage of Scripture, and how different a sense hath been made of it, so as to make it correspond to the particular tenets of different denominations of Christians. Melancholy proof of human infirmity! But let commentators be ever so widely divided in opinion as to certain expressions contained in it, whether, when

* Philippians ii. 5. *et seq.*

the Apostle says, *Christ was in the form of God*, he meant a full, and absolute equality, as some have insisted on *, or whether he meant that Christ was in the form only, and his dignity of a subordinate, and secondary nature, as others have supposed †; give the most unbounded scope to the expression you please, yet all the freedom of translation in the world cannot do away the evident sense of one fact there asserted, namely, that Christ *was* in the form of God, before he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; of consequence it follows, that our blessed Lord had an antecedent state to his humili-

* See Pearson on the Creed, page 12. Bishop Sherlock's Discourses, vol. iii. page 98. Waterland's Sermons, page 182. Tillotson's Sermons, vol. x. page 4379. Stanhope on the Epistles and Gospels, vol. ii. page 433. Grove's Works, vol. viii. page 314, &c. &c.

† See Clark's Sermons, vol. v. Sermon I. page 10. Ditto his Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity, chapter xi. Price's Sermons, page 137. Lindsay's Apology, and the Second Essay of the Commentaries and Essays, published by a society for promoting the knowledge of the Scriptures,

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ation, and appearance in the flesh : so that his being and existence will remain unquestionable, whatever meaning shall be assigned to the phrase of *being in the form of God*. Admitting, therefore, (what on these premises cannot, I think, be denied) that the words of the Apostle fairly express this doctrine, and this is all I am contending for at present ; much more, I am convinced, might be made of this passage of Scripture, for it certainly contains great information of our Lord's dignity, and character *. But these points will more properly meet us under another part of the subject.

From the several quotations of Scripture which have now been brought before you, the first point I had in view to prove, namely, our Lord's pre-existence, is, I hope, fully

* Dr. Price, in his Discourse on the Pre-existence and Dignity of Christ, says, " That, in his opinion, this is the most decisive of all the texts of Scripture ; and he calls it one of the most striking passages of the New Testament." See his Sermons, page 137 and 154.

established. You are in possession of an authority which hath ever been held sacred, and unquestionable. And it now remains with you to determine for yourselves the sufficiency of the evidence. The passages I have selected from others of a similar meaning, (and which, if needful, might have been subjoined,) are of the plainest nature, and such as I think cannot easily be misunderstood. Let me beg of you, therefore, to read them only with a proper attention, and with a cool unprejudiced mind, and accept them in the sense which is most obvious, and such as every candid person would naturally take them in. And I would venture to rest the whole cause of the Gospel upon the event of their testimony, so clear and explicit are they, in support of this important article of our faith *.

* "It is a circumstance a little discouraging," says the same candid writer, "that in reciting this evidence from Scripture, some modern Socinians would not be convinced by it were it ever so clear and decisive." Ibid. page 141.

But

But this doctrine will receive a further confirmation, by an evidence still more striking and palpable, when we proceed to consider our blessed Lord under those great and distinguishing attributes in which the sacred writers have represented him, as the *Creator*, and *Preserver* of the universe.

All the works of creation are expressly ascribed to Christ, in many parts of Scripture; and as these are the greatest acts of Omnipotence we know of, or can conceive, so do they afford the most positive assurance of his divinity.

The same Gospel of St. John which expresses the pre-existence of the Eternal Word with the Father, speaks of him, at the same time, as the Creator of the universe. For, after saying that the Word which was in the beginning with God, and was God, he immediately adds, *All things were made by him.* And, as if this was not sufficiently expressive, he repeats the same truth in a more full, and comprehensive manner, by declaring, that *without him was not any thing*

thing made that was made *. Thus raising our ideas of the omnipotence of Christ to the most exalted height, in clothing him with those great and distinguishing attributes

* The Arian opinion (that our Lord was the first created Being; and that after his creation, God made all things by Jesus Christ,) is not only repugnant to the plain sense of the Apostle in this place, but it is also unauthorized by any other passage of Scripture, and is altogether contradictory to every part of it. For how can this notion, that Jesus himself was a created being, be at all reconciled with the account of the Apostle, who tells us, that *he was in the beginning with God, and was God*; and that by him were *all* things made that were made? Besides, the contradiction this opinion involves the Arian in as being in opposition to Scripture, there is a manifest absurdity in the notion itself, according to a well-known principle in philosophy, that *nothing is made in vain*; how will this correspond with the idea of forming one creature super-eminent, in order to create others? Does it not circumscribe our notions of the omnipotence of the Deity, to imply this necessity? And is it not rather a diminution of our idea of the Almighty, to suffer a creature to share the glories of creation with him? Nay, on the supposition of this being the case, is it not clearly contradictory to Scripture when it is said, *God's honour he will not give to another*? See Isaiah xlii. 8.

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of the Deity. The same truth is asserted again in a subsequent verse, when he tells us, *that he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not* *. No form of words can more fully testify the power of Christ than the works which are here so plainly ascribed to him; and as these operations of our Lord are equal to the highest conceptions we can possibly frame of a divine being, the consequence is evident, that Christ possessed a divine nature. *His eternal power, and Godhead, (as the Apostle Paul observes,) are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made* †.

But it is not on the testimony of one Apostle only that we ground our belief that Christ is the Creator of the universe, there are others of the sacred writers which confirm the same doctrine.

The Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in his first chapter, both ascribes the works of creation, and preservation to our Lord, and speaks of him under such great, and distinguishing characters, as are altoge-

* John i. 2. iii. 10.

† Romans i. 20.

ther irreconcilable with common sense, upon any other idea than that Christ possessed all the attributes of the Deity. *God, (says he) who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the Fathers, by the Prophets, hath in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power.* Words surely as full, and expressive of the divinity of Jesus, as language is capable of furnishing, and which it would be little less than blasphemy to apply to any created being whatever. Indeed this whole chapter is so replete with terms denoting the omnipotence, and eternity of Christ, and ascribing to him every divine honour, that the sacred Writer seems to labour for expressions to describe the dignity and greatness of his person *. He calls our Lord the
Son

* Dr. Price in his Sermons on the Christian Doctrine, speaking of this, and other passages of Scripture which

Son of God, the *brightness of his glory*, and the *express image of his person*; of a nature

which so fully ascribe to Christ the creation of the world, says, "This is a fact that raises our ideas of the pre-existent dignity of Christ higher than any thing else that is said of him in the New Testament." But in order to understand it properly, he says, we should remember that the term *world* in Scripture, means only *this world*, and that by *all things* means only *all things* belonging to this world. See his Sermons, page 142.—But with all possible respect to the Doctor's opinion, I see no reason to limit the power of Christ to this world, nor is there the shadow of an authority which can be found for this limitation in the word of God: on the contrary, there are many which correspond in the affirmation of the same doctrine, without hinting the least restriction. And if we allow ourselves, in this instance, as well as others, to reason from analogy, the creation of one world is a fair implication of the power of creating another. And it is very evident that the words of the Apostle John will not admit of this limitation, for he says, that *all things* were made by him, and without him was not *any thing* made that was made. That the Apostle Paul was of a different opinion from the Doctor is certain; for he tells the Colossians, that not only all things were created by Christ that are in this world, but that *are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible, and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.* Col. i. 16.

superior to angels, and most essentially different from all the servants of God, whether *prophets* or *ministering spirits*, whether *angels* or *men*, which have been sent forth to minister unto them who are the heirs of salvation: the *Creator* and *Upholder of all things*; an *Eternal Being*, whose throne is for ever and ever: and whom at his first entrance into the world the angels of God were commanded to worship *. When I behold the blessed Redeemer of the uni-

* See Hebrews, i. i. *et seq. ad finem*.—The Unitarians, to obviate those Scriptures which make Christ the creator of the world, refer the whole to a figure of speech, and suppose it means the moral world. But, unhappily for their cause, in this chapter, they are deprived of this resource: the words cannot possibly admit of a metaphorical allusion. The sacred writer, after describing the works of Christ in the creation, draws a comparison between their transient nature, and his Eternity, and expressly says, *They shall perish, but thou remainest, and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, &c.* Now, this cannot be applied to the moral world; for nothing there will wax old as doth a garment, or decay, for Christ himself hath said, *Sooner shall heaven and earth pass, than one jot or tittle of the moral law shall fail."* Matth. v. 18.

verse

verse thus described; under the power of inspiration, as possessing all the peculiar attributes of the Deity, I am astonished how any man who professes to receive the holy Scriptures as the guide of his faith, can behold this divine person so clearly, and circumstantially pointed out, under such great and eternal characters, and yet consider him still as a created being. What language, or expressions could the sacred writer have made use of, to convey to us, in stronger terms than he has done, the certainty of our Lord's divinity? Every verse of this chapter seems more or less expressive of it, and so much to the purpose is the whole taken together, that if this convinces not, all further application to Scripture on this point, I fear, will be superfluous and vain.

But though these passages might be sufficient to answer my present argument, and I trust your faith needs no further reference, in order to establish your hearts firm in the persuasion that our Lord is the Creator of the universe, yet as it cannot but be grati-

fyng to every sincere believer in this important doctrine, to find the truth of it attested in many other parts of the New Testament, I shall add one or two more of the same kind with those we have already reviewed, for the confirmation of it.

In the third chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the sacred writer draws a comparison between Moses the great law-giver of the Old Covenant, and Jesus the Mediator of the New, in order to point out the vast inferiority of the former, when brought in competition with the latter, by reason of the very different nature of their persons, and the different characters they sustained. *For this man (says he) was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded a house hath more honour than the house, for every house is built by some man, but he who built all things is God **. Now here is another decisive proof, and not easily to be mistaken,

* Heb. iii. 3.

that

that the sacred writer considered Christ as the Creator of the world, and possessed a divinity equal to such an operation; adding as an unavoidable inference from what he had said, that *he who built all things must be God*. And to confirm this still more, he proceeds, in the following verse, to point out in what that distinction which so highly discriminated our Lord from Moses did consist. *Moses* (says he) *verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, but Christ as a Son over his own house, whose house are we*. This, it is true, is a figurative mode of expression, but so very plain as to require but little illustration. The Apostle couches it under the image of an household, where God is considered as the Father of the family, and Christ the Son and heir. Moses, and all other messengers, whether angels, prophets, or apostles, are servants and attendants only. The superiority of our blessed Lord's character, and the divinity of his person, could hardly have been represented under any figure more apt, or expressive than this, which so fully

points out his relationship with the supreme Father, and the essential line of distinction which must for ever take place between the son and heir of a family, and the highest order of servants whatever. Consider the character of Moses as it is mentioned in Scripture, and then behold him in the class of servants to our Lord, and you will require nothing more to shew you the very different characters they sustained, and, of consequence, the very different point of view in which they ought to be regarded. *There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land; And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.* Deut. xxxiv. 10.

So again, we read upon another occasion, the decided superiority of Moses over all Prophets, and Messengers, whom Jehovah ever sent, when Miriam and Aaron rebelled against the government of Moses, and assumed

sumed an equal authority with him. *Hath the Lord spoken only to him (say they) hath he not spoken also by us?* The determination of God is full to the point. *If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches, and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold, wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses *?* Such is the exalted description given in Scripture of this highly favoured servant of the Lord. But the Apostle tells us that this Moses, this mighty and greatest of all prophets, which arose in Israel, when brought in comparison with Jesus, was nothing. He was but a servant to Christ; and though faithful in all his house, *for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after*; yet, in every point of view, he was subordinate to him who

* Numbers xii. 6. et seq.

was a son in his own house, *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.* Can any thing, with more pointed emphasis, define the dignity of our blessed Lord's character !

You will not, I hope, think it trespassing too much upon your time, and patience, if I add to these testimonies one passage more from Scripture, in confirmation of the important doctrine we are considering, for it is peculiarly apposite to our purpose, and seems expressive of every particular by which the divinity of Jesus as an Omnipotent Being can be illustrated and proved. The passage I allude to is in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. In which, speaking of Jesus Christ, he thus expresses himself: *He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature* *. *By him were all things*

* First-born of every creature. I have preserved the phrase as it stands in our present translation, because I presume not to correct it: But it is well known, the original, which is *πρωτοτοκος πασης κτισεως*, literally means the first begotten before all creation, and the general

*things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible, and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things; and by him all things consist *.*

This passage is most happily calculated to clear up every possible doubt (if any could yet remain) concerning the real dignity of our blessed Lord, and it is altogether so much to the purpose, that no form of words could have been brought within the same compass equally strong, and expressive to the point in question. It should seem, indeed, as though the Apostle by the spirit

general sense of the verse clearly makes it so. For he who made all things in heaven and earth, must himself have had existence underived from creation.

* It is hardly credible that any one can interpret this passage of the Apostle as though it referred to a new creation in a spiritual sense; and yet without this construction, which surely is highly strained, there would be no shadow of consistency in the Socinian Creed. See Scott's *Christian Life*, vol. iii. page 559.

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of prophecy, had foreseen the doubts, and objections of certain Christians, and particularly directed his attention, in this place, to silence every scruple concerning our Lord's true character, by declaring his possession of such attributes as could only be consistent with true, and proper divinity. For to shew Christ's pre-existence, he first styles him *the image of the invisible God, born or begotten before every creature*. To prove his possession of unlimited power, he next declares, that *all things were created by him*: and that no one either through weakness, or perversion, might misconstrue his sense, and meaning, he goes on to prove, that Christ possessed this sovereign power inherently, and underived from another; for all things (he says) were not only created *by him*, but *for him*; thereby silencing all the arguments of those who allow Christ to have been the creator of the world, yet regard him not as the efficient cause, but merely as the agent of his supreme Father; whereas the Apostle positively says, *All things were created by him, and for him*. And still more, to put the
matter

matter beyond all doubt, he repeats the same truth again, in saying, that *by him do all things consist*. And lastly, to remove all possible ideas of a local power circumscribed by space, or limited in operation to this world only, he tells us, that *by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth*; not simply material substances, such as our eyes behold, and no other, but immaterial, *visible and invisible*: and these not only of the lowest order, but even the highest and the best, *whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers*: *All without exception, were created by him, and for him, and by him do all things consist*. Thus, as with an indelible seal, the Apostle, in this chapter, hath stamped the certainty of the divine nature of the blessed Redeemer of the world, ascribing such attributes, and perfections to him, as are utterly irreconcilable with any possible idea of a created being, and can with justice be applied to none but the one true God.

I have now finished all the quotations
from

from Scripture which I conceive to be necessary in proof of the great object I had in view in this discourse. And if the evidence of the inspired writers can be at all depended upon, no possible question will remain of the truth of what they have so positively asserted, that our blessed Lord had an antecedent state of glory to his incarnation, and is the Creator, and Preserver of the universe. And surely these perfections include such essential attributes of the Deity as fully prove our Lord's claim to this distinguished character. For, (as an Apostle justly reasons,) *He who built all things is God.*

When we behold the blessed Redeemer of the world revealed to us under such august, and eternal distinctions, possessing an existence *in glory with his Father, before all worlds, the Maker, and Upholder* of all things; is it possible to see our Lord thus represented, without being struck with horror at a presumption so dreadful as that of dethroning the Son of God, and reducing him
to

to the level of a poor creature like ourselves*. Would this meek and humble Saviour have arrogated to himself divine honours, unless his pretensions had been well founded? Or can any one conceive that he would have declared he possessed glory with his Father, with other expressions of a similar nature, intimating his pre-existent state, when that existence began only at his incarnation? Much less would the Apostles of such a master have dared to apply to him the distinguishing characteristics of the supreme God, but upon the most perfect conviction of their justice and propriety?

Pause one moment, I beseech you, and seriously consider the importance of those questions. No act of omnipotence which our present faculties are capable of conceiving, surpasses the works of creation. And hence we find, in the Old Testament, when God

* Some Christians in their opinions of our Lord have gone so far as even to have supposed him peccable, and fallible. See Dr. Price's account of this in his Sermons, page 129.

is pleased to reveal himself to the Israelites, in order to impress their minds with a proper awe, and reverence of the astonishing greatness of his character, he refers them to the works of creation as proofs of his omnipotence, and calls upon them to draw a just and proper distinction between his eternal nature, and the perishable idols of the heathens around them. *Thus saith the Lord, who hath created the heavens, and stretched them out, I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be any after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal, saith the Holy One? Behold the gods of the heathen are of nothing, and their works of nought: Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong*

*strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob; Let them bring forth and shew us what shall happen, that we may know that ye are gods; yea, do good or do evil that we may be dismayed, and behold it together **. In these, and the like awful characters, hath the Lord displayed the sovereignty of his power, as instanced in the works of the creation, and there is no one of the divine attributes so frequently referred to in holy Scripture, in order to strike the mind of man with a proper conviction of the greatness of God, as this of his omnipotence. Probably, because it is best suited to our present conceptions, which are most likely to be affected by great and magnificent objects.

But, perhaps, a difficulty may seem to arise, how to reconcile with each other, those equivalent phrases, which ascribe the creation of the universe both to the Father, and to the Son. If God the Father be thus clearly revealed in Scripture as the

* Isaiah xl. xli. &c.

maker of all things, and if the same authority teach us to understand the same of the Son, how is this to be consistently explained? This difficulty is at once removed by a reference to the same unerring standard of truth, from whence we learn, that there is such an intimate union subsisting between the Father and the Son, that the acts of the one are equally the acts of the other; according to our Lord's own account of this mystery, *Whatsoever works the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son* *. In short, the fact itself once admitted that Christ is the Creator of all things, the doctrine of the divine unity will naturally be included. If you wish to go farther, and question how, and in what manner this unity consists? Here I remain silent; reason is incompetent to answer, and the word of God, which is our only guide in the abstruse points of religion, hath not condescended to inform us. Perhaps it was impossible to explain it in terms suitable to the apprehensions of mankind. It was

* John v. 19.

thought sufficient, therefore, to give proofs of the fact itself, without accounting for the method by which this mysterious connection is preserved. Our Lord's own declarations enable us to ascertain the certainty of the doctrine, but they leave the mind wholly at a loss to form any just idea of the manner of its operation. *I and my Father are one* *. *My Father worketh hitherto and I work* †. *All things that the Father hath are mine* ‡. *I can do nothing of myself, but my Father which dwelleth in me he doeth the works. What things soever he doeth these also doeth the Son likewise* §. These expressions very evidently determine the truth of the thing itself; but how, and in what way, this hypostatic union is preserved, I have not the smallest conception, no more than I can explain those equally mysterious passages of the Apostle when he says, that *God was in Christ, reconciling the*

* John x. 30.

† John v. 17.

‡ John xvi. 15.

§ John v. 19.

*world to himself**. And in him (that is in Christ) *dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily* †. But when I trace, through every part of the sacred volume, the evident footsteps of a Being equal to all the ideas I can possibly frame of the Deity, in the person of Jesus Christ, and such actions as leave at an infinite distance every character among the sons of men, I am deeply smitten with the conviction of his divine nature, and can plainly perceive that there is somewhat more intended than what at first appears in these words of Christ: *No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither any man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him* ‡. In short, when I contemplate the whole of this awful, and mysterious subject, as it is connected with the history of our blessed Lord, and consider the defective state of our present faculties, the very great probability, (to say the least of it,) that human beings, after all their

* 2 Corinth. v. 19.

† Coloss. ii. 9.

‡ Matth. xi. 27.

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researches, will never penetrate very deeply into the secret dispensations of God: I stand amazed that any man should be bold enough to refuse his assent to doctrines because they are not commensurate to reason, much less that he should deny the divinity of the Son of God, upon the presumptive conclusions of his own mind, in opposition to such a body of evidence as is contained in every part of the pure oracles of God. While the argument remains at all doubtful, which the hardiest Unitarian will scarce venture to pronounce finished, surely it must be safer to err (if it be an error) on one side, than the other; to give too much dignity to the great Saviour of the world, whom the Father delighteth to honour, rather than too little. For the very reason which Christ gives why the future judgment is committed unto the Son, is on this express account, *that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father; and he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him* *.

* John v. 23.

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But

But I am anticipating the observations which will come with greater force, and propriety, when we have gone over the evidences which remain yet to be examined on this important doctrine of our Lord's divinity. Let me only hope that enough hath been said for the present, to interest your opinion, if not thoroughly to convince your judgment, that there is a presumptive argument, at least, that *he* of whom these great things are so confidently said cannot possibly be a creature. And since common sense revolts at the absurdity of supposing him divine, and yet not God, I trust we are among the number of those humble and teachable minds, who presume not to reject the testimony of Scripture, because the doctrine of God Incarnate is too mysterious for reason to explore.

S E R M O N III.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures,—they are they which testify of me.

THE noble faculty of reason, which is the distinguishing excellence of man, among other eminent uses, is evidently given him to direct his judgment, and to guard his mind from error, and delusion. From the present imperfect state of things, however, reason, unassisted by some superior principle, finds perpetual difficulties, which perplex and confound the understanding. Human nature is always open to imposition. We frequently behold objects through false mediums: we argue from mistaken principles: we adopt opinions which we afterwards find to be erroneous, and yet too of-

ten, from the influence of those prepossessions, we draw our conclusions. Hence, therefore, we cannot be too much upon our guard how we hastily determine on any matter. After all our most vigilant observations, how little knowledge are we able to obtain even of the most common events of life, which pass in daily review before us. But when the great and awful points of religion are the subject of enquiry, when that *sacred mystery hid from ages*, the wonder of the universe, and which even *angels do not comprehend, but desire to look into* *, when this is brought before the mind for discussion, with what caution ought we to decide on a matter so abstruse and difficult ! Here, surely, if any where, reason finds her weakness and insufficiency, and therefore should gladly implore that divine illumination from above, *which is promised in Scripture to the pious and the humble.*

In the preceding discourse some observations were made with a view to ascertain

* 1 Peter i. 12.

the dignity of our Lord. His pre-existence to his advent in the flesh was proved from the authority of Scripture; and this fact was supported by another striking circumstance founded on the same testimony, namely, his being the Creator, and Preserver of the universe. Under such great and eternal characters does the Author of the Christian faith appear in those sacred records!

But, on the supposition of the truth of these premises, an observation meets us which demands attention. It is this: if Christ really possessed this existence, and glory with his Father before the world, and is the maker and upholder of all things, is it not more than probable that some appearance of him should have been discovered, through the many intermediate ages from the fall of man to his advent in the flesh. For though the incarnation of the Son of God, for reasons unknown to us, was postponed to what is called *the fulness of time*, in which all the predictions concerning this illustrious character of the Messiah centered,

yet surely it is but reasonable to expect some vestige, at least, of this divine person in the earlier ages of the world, especially as God was pleased occasionally to vouchsafe to his fallen and degraded creatures, some manifestations of his will.

This observation is certainly a very natural one, and claims some regard. And though I cannot conceive a proof of this kind to be necessary, on the supposition that the fact itself of Christ's pre-existence is clearly ascertained, yet if any traces can be found in the Old Testament, corresponding to the account we find of him in the New, they will, no doubt, mutually illustrate, and confirm each other, and altogether serve to place the blessed Redeemer's character in such an exalted point of view, as may help to strengthen our faith in this great article of religion.

And here a subject opens to our investigation which may engage the closest study, and will reward the greatest exertions of the most enlightened mind. In searching the sacred volume for the footsteps of him *whose*
goings

*goings forth have been from everlasting **, perhaps it will be found that all the dispensations of God, relating to mankind, from the very first dawn of revelation, have been uniformly, and invariably carried on in the person of his divine Son: that he is the Jehovah, to whom is ascribed the creation of the world; who resided occasionally among men before the fall; whose voice Adam heard in the garden of Eden; who personally appeared to Abraham, and to many others, in the patriarchal ages; spake unto Moses from the flaming bush; went before the children of Israel through the wilderness; descended on Mount Sinai enshrined in glory, and gave the law; and was visible, in a great variety of instances, to that people, as best suited the various purposes of his will. In short, from the creation of the world, to the final consummation of all things, it is he, and he only, who hath carried on, and will complete, the executive part of the divine government, appearing

1 Micah v. 2.

under

under the several characters mentioned of him in Scripture, according as the circumstances of mankind required, in the several ages of the world. Hence he is our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and finally will be our Judge, when he cometh, agreeable to his promise, at the last day, to close the whole of his government in righteousness, when *he will deliver up the kingdom to his Father, and God will be all in all* *.

* This passage in the Corinthians, I Epistle, chap. xv. ver. 28, hath been thought by some to imply so much of inferiority in Christ that the Unitarian brings it forward with full confidence. But it appears to me not to relate to the point in question; it hath a reference only to our Lord's ministration in the flesh. The sense of it is certainly no more than this: when Christ shall have put all things under his feet, that is, when all the great purposes of his incarnation are fulfilled, the redemption of mankind by his death and sacrifice, the great office of his mediation accomplished, and the faithful for ever secured by his gracious undertaking from any future possibility of danger; then Christ will have completed all the grand purposes for which he came from heaven, and will deliver up the kingdom to his Father. And then God the Father, together with the Son and Holy Spirit, *will be all in all*.

Now

Now whether this opinion can derive any countenance and authority from Scripture, is the important question; but it must be confessed there is nothing in it which is foreign to our most natural ideas of the supreme Being, or repugnant either to reason, or revelation. On the contrary, there seems to be an admirable consistency and agreement with both. For that the same divine person who made the world, and by whose energy and power it is continually preserved, and supported, should interpose to rectify, and amend the evils crept into it by human infirmity, and at length should come to judge the moral subjects of his government, who by their different abilities are placed in a situation of becoming accountable creatures; this is certainly just what might be expected, and corresponding to all our notions of right reason. And on the supposition that this is the true state of the case, I will venture to say the mind of man cannot conceive any thing more magnificent and awful, than that of a divine and almighty Being descending from a state of glory, and
taking

taking upon him a form of flesh, in order *to repair the desolations of many generations, and to restore perfect order among all the works of God.* The whole process of the divine dispensations, according to this scheme, is begun, carried on, and will be completed, by him who *is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever* *.

It cannot be supposed, in the very nature of things, that human faculties are competent to trace so mysterious a subject very far. *The way of God, (says the Psalmist,) is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known* †. Yet as the divine goodness, in order as it were to excite the attention of man, hath graciously condescended to throw some rays of light around the darkness of the scene, and hath moreover promised the assistance of his Holy Spirit to all that, in humility of mind, seek instruction from above, there appears an evident duty, as well as a reward of the noblest kind, attending the investigation of this most

* Heb. xiii. 8.

† Psalm lxxvii. 19.

interesting of all subjects. And what can engage the attention of the human mind with so much satisfaction, as the humble endeavour to explore the footsteps of that great benefactor of mankind to whom we owe such inexpressible obligation! In doing this we are also obeying the precept which our blessed Master gave to the Jews, upon a similar occasion, when he referred them to the sacred writings for the evidences of his commission, and authority. *Search the Scriptures* (says Christ) *for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.* In obedience to this command let us direct our attention to this pursuit, and after having first implored the Holy Spirit to be our guide, let us examine what information we can gather from thence respecting our blessed Master. Perhaps now *the vail of the Old Testament is done away in Christ, we may, through the divine blessing, with open face, behold as in a glass the glory of our Lord*.*

* 2 Corinthians iii. 15. 18.

The leading object of the present discourse will be to search the Scriptures for any traces of Christ, in the early ages of the world, sufficient to establish our belief of his personal appearance among men.

The invisibility of the divine Being to mortal eye is well known to be the doctrine of both Testaments of Scripture. *Thou canst not see my face, and live **, saith Jehovah to Moses. And the Apostles of Christ assert the same thing, *No man* (saith St. John) *hath seen God at any time †*. And St. Paul assures us, that *God dwelleth in that light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see ‡*. He is *the king eternal, immortal, invisible §*. And our blessed Lord himself, to sum up the evidence, hath declared, that *no man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father ||*. *Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his*

* Exodus xxxiii. 20.

† 1 Timothy vi. 16.

‡ John vi. 46.

† John i. 18.

§ 1 Timothy i. 17.

shape.

shape *. From all which it is evident that the sight of the supreme Father is inadmissible to man in his present state.

This being a fact perfectly incontrovertible, the question is, what are we to understand from those numerous passages of Scripture where the presence of the Lord is most positively assured? unless we apply it to the person of God's only begotten Son, who is declared to be *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*. Without referring to all the instances of this kind which might be brought forward in proof, I believe every one who is at all conversant with the sacred writings, will immediately recollect that there are many very striking passages where the personal appearance of Jehovah is declared to have happened, and upon various occasions. I am not speaking of such as are visionary, or figurative, but real, and certain. I am sensible of the allowances to be made for the metaphorical language of Scripture so suited to

* John v. 37.

the genius of the Eastern nations. Thus, the *right arm* of the Lord, and the *voice* of the Lord; these, no doubt, are figurative expressions. And *earthquakes, storms, and tempests*, by way of figure, are frequently called *angels*, and *messengers* of Jehovah. But this is not the case in the circumstances to which I allude. When, for example, we read in the Book of Exodus *that Jehovah talked with Moses face to face, as a man talketh with his friend**. So again, when in a conference like this with the great Father of the faithful, Jehovah assumes to himself a supreme power, and speaks of his future dispensations respecting mankind, not as the agent of another, but as acting in his own name, and by his own authority†. And when it is said also, in another place, *that Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of the people saw the God of Israel‡*. These instances surely can never be called visional, symbolical, or figurative. It is plain sense, and plain meaning, and if

* Exod. xxxiii. 11.

† Gen. xvii.

‡ Exod. xxiv. 9, 10.

there

there be any one matter of fact on which we may safely depend, it must be here, for if these repeated assurances of the personal appearance of Jehovah, can, by any plausible argument, be reduced to a mere figure, or vision, there is nothing to be met with in the whole volume of Scripture but by a like accommodation may be as easily construed away from its first, and most obvious acceptance.

That these appearances were in the person of the Son of God, I by no means assert; upon so mysterious a subject I would be understood as speaking with the utmost caution and diffidence. Could the point once be proved that it was our blessed Lord, there would be an end to all controversy respecting his divinity; such manifestations of deity, accompanied with such declarations of character, must for ever silence all doubts on this head. But if they be real appearances, and not figurative, and if (as an Apostle tells us) that though *no man hath seen God at any time, yet the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the*

H

Father,

*Father, he hath declared him**; it seems very likely to suppose that all the accounts we meet with in Scripture of the manifestation of a personal Jehovah, might, with great safety, be explained by this infallible rule.

But that we may not too hastily determine on this important matter, let us search the word of God further, and see whether we can gain any additional information that may illustrate this point more fully.

One leading principle to help us in this enquiry the Jewish Scriptures happily supply. In the relation they give of this appearance of Jehovah, we find, throughout the whole history, but one and the same being uniformly described. However distinguished by different appellations, or titles, as might best correspond to the immediate purpose of his appearing, whether he be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel, or the Angel of the Covenant, still one and the same per-

* John i. 18.

son is invariably intended. The Jehovah which expelled Adam from the garden of Eden was the same Jehovah who made a covenant with Abraham, and who declared that *he would not leave him until he had done all that he had spoken to him of, and that in his seed should all families of the earth be blessed**. Accordingly we find he renewed this covenant with the patriarchs, and again revealed himself to Moses, from the flaming bush, under the same almighty distinctions. And when, from the Egyptian bondage, after a series of the most stupendous events, he had led the children of Israel through the wilderness, until he had brought them into the promised Canaan, upon every occasion in which he was graciously pleased to manifest his presence, the same great character was invariably proclaimed, by which he was distinguished as their God, and they his people, and the sheep of his pasture. At length, when the Israelites were settled in their own borders, and a temple was built to the more imme-

* Genesis xxviii. 15.

diatè honour of their Lord, though the personal appearance of Jehovah, was now withdrawn, the shechinah, or manifestation of his glory still appeared, shadowing the mercy-seat, but without form or similitude; yet before his departure, and when the temple was destroyed, the same Jehovah assured them, by his prophets, that *he would return again in the latter days, and dwell in the midst of them* *; that *the glory of the latter house should be greater than the former* †, and that he would make a *new covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that he had made with their fathers, in the day when he had brought them from the land of Egypt* ‡. All which evidently and clearly proves, that one and the same almighty Being constantly presided over the affairs of his church.

This identity of person and character will be of great help to us in our enquiry to whom it belongs. And if we can find a

* Zechariah ii. 10.

† Haggai ii. 9.

‡ Jeremiah xxxi. 31.

single instance of sufficient authority from the New Testament, to suppose it applicable to our blessed Lord, it will throw a considerable degree of light upon the whole history, and become not a little conclusive to the point in question.

Among many circumstances of this kind which might be brought forward as presumptive evidences to induce the belief that the personal Jehovah of the Old Testament is the same being with the Lord of the New, the following are remarkably striking.

When Jehovah appeared to Moses in the flame of fire in the bush, he was pleased to reveal himself under that great and eternal distinction, *I am that I am**, which is the very appellation Christ assumed when discoursing with the Jews on the subject of his mission, he claimed a priority of existence to Abraham, and said, *Before Abraham was, I am*†: An argument strongly presumptive, at least, that when our blessed Lord distinguished himself by this incom-

* Exod. iii. 14.

† John viii. 58.

municable name of the great Jehovah, he referred to this awful scene, and thereby intimated his real character. And that the Jews considered our Lord's meaning in this sense is more than probable, for they immediately took up stones to cast at him, for the supposed blasphemy; but he, by virtue of this very divinity, in a miraculous manner, so concealed himself from their knowledge, that *going through the midst of them, they knew him not, and he passed by* *.

Another instance very highly presumptive to justify our belief that our blessed Lord was the personal Jehovah mentioned in the Old Testament, we meet with in the writings of the Apostle Paul, in which he is illustrating a passage in the Jewish history. The passage is this: The children of Israel, in their journey through the wilderness, pitched in Rephidim, where they murmured for want of water; upon which occasion Moses cried unto the Lord, and the

* John viii, 59,

Lord commanded Moses, saying, *Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and the rod wherewith thou smotest the river take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there, upon the rock in Horeb, and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel**. Now, that no one may be at a loss for the explanation of this passage, we have the authority of an Apostle to apply this personal appearance of Jehovah to our blessed Lord, *For they drank (says he), of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ**.

Similar to this, upon another occasion, in the history of that people, when Jehovah sent fiery serpents to destroy them for their disobedience, and murmuring, the Apostle, in his reflections and observations upon their unworthy behaviour, uses this remarkable argument to his Corinthian con-

* Compare Exodus xvii. with 1 Corinth. x,

verts, to deter them from the imitation of so bad an example. *Neither* (says he) *let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents* *. A plain proof that it was the opinion of St. Paul that the Jehovah who conducted the Israelites through the wilderness, and manifested himself to them upon various occasions, was no other than Christ.

Lastly, The Evangelist St. John makes an application of a passage in one of the prophets, which seems to remove all doubt that the glory of Jehovah, which the prophet beheld in a vision, was the glory of Christ himself. Our blessed Lord having wrought no conviction upon the hearts of his hearers, at a time when preaching his gospel to them, though his doctrine was attested with the operation of miracles, this brought to mind to the Apostle the prediction of Isaiah the prophet; *He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor under-*

* Compare Numbers xxi. with 1 Corinth. x.

*stand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias when he saw his glory, and spake of him *.*

This quotation from the prophet, which the Evangelist without hesitation applies to Christ, carries with it an evidence not easily refuted. And if the authority of such an expofitor is at all valid to our argument, it must, I think, have great weight with every candid mind†.

* Compare Ifaiah vi. with John xii.

† It were easy to adduce many instances more than those I have mentioned, but one or two are sufficient for the purpose; some of those I have omitted are very much to the point in question, and have been very largely treated of by other writers. Such as the similarity between the glory of Jehovah in the mount, and our Lord's transfiguration, and which induced those reflections in the mind of the Apostle Peter. The appearance of the captain of the Lord's host to Joshua. The preaching of Christ, in the days of Noah, as mentioned by St. Peter, &c. &c. If any one would wish to see these instances placed in a strong point of view, I would refer him to Dr. Allix on the Jewish church, page 245. and Taylor's Letters, vol. i. page 283. or Arch. Tenison on Idolatry, page 333.

But

But these evidences will be strengthened in their importance when we proceed to consider also certain peculiarities ascribed to the person of Christ by the sacred writers, and assumed by Jesus himself, which could not, with the smallest shadow of reason, be applied to him, but under the idea that he was the Jehovah, and God of Israel, which appeared to our fathers in the wilderness. St. John, in the first chapter of his gospel, speaking of the eternal Word, *which was in the beginning with God, and was God, who made the world, was in the world, and the world knew him not*, adds also that *he came unto his own, and his own received him not* *. This is a strong implication of Christ's being relatively known before. For, whether we consider the expression *his own* †, as referring to the Jews who

* John i.

† This expression *his own* hath been variously interpreted by various writers. Some have thought it referred to the Jews, from our Lord's consanguinity, being himself a Jew. Others, who confine the sense also to that people, have yet supposed it refers to them, not on account

who were called God's peculiar people, or whether by right, as the Creator of the world; in either case his pre-existence, and personal connection with mankind, by virtue of some priority of right and inheritance, must be pre-supposed, and admitted. It could not be in his character, as the *Redeemer* of the world, for in this case the right would have preceded the purchase; and moreover this would have made the expression inapplicable to the Jews only. It evidently proves, therefore, some antecedent connexion, by virtue of which Christ was their Lord, and they his people. And where are we to look for this but in that history where it is said, *Jehovah chose them to be a special people to himself, above all the people who were upon the face of the earth* *.

account of this relationship, but from their being peculiarly the chosen people of the Lord. A third class, from the context, have concluded that *his own* must imply the whole universe at large, in consequence of his right by creation. And in this latter opinion we find Irenæus, Clemens Hippolitus, and Novatian; writers of the second and third centuries,

* Deut. vii. 6,

Again:

Again; Christ's lamentation over Jerusalem, and the particular and affecting expressions he made use of upon that occasion, is another very great probability (to speak the least of it) of our Lord's personal appearance, and connection with the children of Israel, before his incarnation. St. Luke informs us, that *when he came near to Jerusalem he beheld the city, and wept over it* *; and St. Matthew, in his account of this transaction, adds, that he brake forth into that tender apostrophe, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that were sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not* †. Now it becomes a very proper question, under what part of the sacred history of the life of Jesus Christ, do we find this anxiety for Israel, before the season of his humiliation in the flesh? What page of the Testament are we to look for those repeated instances of his love, and

* Luke xix. 41.

† Matthew xxiii. 37.

solicitude for them? There is no one passage that can with the smallest propriety be considered as relating to Christ's passionate lamentation over this unhappy people. It is plain, therefore, that he must have alluded to some former period when he says, he would often have gathered the children of Israel together, with an anxiety equal to that of the hen, when she seeks to cover her brood from danger, with the spreading of her wings. And corresponding to this idea, we find, in the 31 chapter of Deuteronomy, that Jehovah is represented as exceedingly anxious for the preservation of his people; that *he found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; that he led him about and instructed him, and kept him as the apple of an eye. Jehovah alone did lead him, there was no strange God in him.* Now if Jehovah alone did lead him, and Christ in his anxiety, evidently referred to some former instances of his affection, is it not a most probable conclusion, that this history is altogether applicable to our blessed Lord.

These

These circumstances are to me, I confess, very strong presumptive evidences, at least, that Christ was the visible Jehovah, who occasionally appeared both before, and under the Jewish dispensation. The application made by the sacred writers in the history of Christ to that period; the peculiarities distinguishable in our Lord's person; and the expressions he himself made use of, will hardly admit of any other construction.

But there is another argument yet remaining to be considered, which gives strength and confirmation to the whole, and is certainly superior to every other. On the truth of which, if I mistake not, depends, in a great measure, the connection of both Testaments of Scripture; and which, indeed, if it be not allowed, destroys all consistency between them. And that is, Christ cannot be the Messiah, nor the real law-giver of Christians, unless he answers to the character predicted of him in the Scriptures of the Jews.

This

S E R M O N III. 111

This view of the subject is striking, and deserves a more particular discussion.

I have already observed, in the course of this sermon, that the history of the Jewish church, by preserving an identity of person in the great and almighty protector of their nation, has happily supplied us with one leading principle to guide through the mysterious part of the subject we are upon. And here it becomes most eminently serviceable. For it is evident, from all the history of that people, that the Jehovah who appeared to Abraham, and made an everlasting covenant with him, and confirmed this covenant to his descendants, in the solemn promulgation of the law on mount Sinai, and continued the manifestation of his presence among that people occasionally, as circumstances required, until the building of the temple, expressly promised, before he withdrew the glory of his appearance, that he would come again in the latter days, and dwell among them. *Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for lo I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the*

*the Lord**. And in that day shall it be said, *Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation†*. All which plainly refers to one and the same person and character; for in that day it is said, *The Lord shall be king over all the earth, and there shall be one Lord, and his name one ‡*. And as a further confirmation of this, the Prophet Jeremiah expressly declares, that the Jehovah who made the old covenant, with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah, is the same Jehovah who would return again in the latter days, and make a new. *Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt, (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband to them, saith the Lord)*. But this shall be the co-

* Zech. ii. 10. † Isaiah xxv. 9. ‡ Zech. xiv. 9.

venant

*covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people *.*

Now from the testimony of these Scriptures we have authority to draw the following conclusions; first, That the same almighty Jehovah which led, and governed, and protected the children of Israel, during the whole of their eventful history, was expected to come again, and dwell among them in the latter days. And, secondly, That this Jehovah at his return was to make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah, and different from the covenant which he had before made with their fathers, in the day he took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

Hence, therefore, it seems to follow, that if Christ be not the Jehovah which manifested himself to the Israelites in the wil-

* Jeremiah xxxi. 31, 32.

derness, according to those Scriptures, he is not the Jehovah they were taught to expect, and consequently, not the Messiah. Neither could he be the Jehovah which was to make a *new* covenant with the house of Israel, unless he be the same Jehovah which made the *old*.

And this identity of person and character, is not only essential to be preserved for the completion of these promises of Scripture, but must be carefully distinguished on another equally important consideration. The Jews were plainly taught to expect a change in their system of legislation, but they were as plainly taught it should be accomplished by one and the same being. The Jehovah which was to make the new covenant was the founder of the old: and nothing less than this could certainly be sufficient for its alteration: for as the law given on Mount Sinai, was of divine authority, and accompanied with all the manifestations of the divine presence, it is evident none but the original law-giver himself could possibly supersede, or do away its obligation.

ligation. Nor was this change in the law of Moses the smallest impeachment of the immutability of the divine nature. For the alteration was not in God, but man. The *moral* law still continues the same, and will remain for ever; for it is of eternal duration: and as Christ observed, *Sooner might heaven and earth pass than one jot or tittle of this law to fail.* He came, therefore, *not to destroy this law, but to fulfil it* *. But the *ceremonial* law could be no longer necessary when the purpose for which it ministered was answered and completed; when the substance was once come, the shadow was of course done away. Besides, many reasons concurred also to render the removal of the Mosaic ordinances expedient. When the Israelites became scattered into divers countries, there could no longer remain the possibility of performing the sacrifices at the Temple, nor of appearing three times in a year at their solemn feasts, at Jerusalem †. And when the kingdom of

* Matthew v. 17.

† Deut. xii. 14.

the Messiah was come, which by a progressive influence was to extend over the whole earth, the name of Jehovah, no longer limited to an handful of people, was to be *great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense was to be offered unto his name, and a pure offering* *.

From these united considerations it appears to be a fair and probable conclusion, that the great law-giver of Christians is the original law-giver of the Jews; for this preserves an harmony (which otherwise is broken) between both Testaments of Scripture, and proves them to be consistent with the divine immutability on which the whole is founded.

If then these circumstances collectively taken form a body of evidence sufficient to rest our belief on, that the great Author of the Christian faith, whose dignity and character we have in part already reviewed †, who was in possession, as he himself assures us, of *glory with the Father before the world*

* Malachi i. 11.

† See Sermon II.

was, and whom the sacred writers declare to have been in conjunction with his Father, the *Maker* and *Preserver* of *all things*; if these circumstances, I say, collectively taken *, authorize our belief that Jesus is the Jehovah who personally appeared under the Jewish dispensation, and in the earlier ages of the world, I think it will follow, that every objection to his divinity must yield to the clear and express revelation of his having appeared among men previous to his incarnation; and we have reason to believe, that all the ordinations of God respecting mankind, have been uniformly, and

* *Collectively taken.* “It surely need not be remarked, (says a very ingenious and sensible writer on the authenticity of the Book of Revelation,) that when many circumstances concur in proof of any cause, though each of them singly taken, may not be thought of weight sufficient on which to ground a decision, do yet, when collectively taken, produce an evidence which to every unprejudiced mind is perfectly satisfactory, and convincing.” I would beg this remark to be applied to the case before us. See an Address to the Deists on the Revelations. Printed for Rivington, 1788.

invariably conducted in the person of his blessed Son.

Though what hath been now offered cannot, from the very nature of things, be considered more than the faint outlines of a subject, which, taken in all its parts, surpasses human abilities to explore; yet I should hope it is sufficient to give some little insight, (as far as we have Scripture authority to carry us) into this part of the mysterious government of God. And from this view we not only perceive a wonderful consistency throughout the whole design of revelation, but also the conclusion naturally resulting from it, namely, that one and the same Almighty Architect both planned and executed the physical and moral structure of human nature.

And now I should hope, the evidence for the divinity of Jesus like a mighty river, increasing as it descends from the numerous streams pouring into it on every side, swells upon your mind and carries all opposition before it. And when we come to view the testimony which appears in the history
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of our blessed Lord during his incarnation, all leading to the same conclusion, our hearts overpowered with the torrent of conviction will cry out with Nathaniel, *This is the Son of God, this is the King of Israel* *.

* John i. 49.

S E R M O N IV.

ACTS xxviii. 23.

*Persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of
the law of Moses, and out of the prophets.*

ONE of the decisive and infallible evidences of the Christian religion, is derived from the Scriptures of the Prophets *. The wonderful circumstances relating

* The Scriptures of the Prophets (as Bishop Newton justly observes) are only one argument, out of many, of the truth of the Christian Religion. "For there must be a divine revelation, if there be any truth in prophecy, and there must be truth in prophecy, if there be any dependence upon the testimony of others, or upon our own senses; upon what we read in books, or upon what we see in the world. Men are sometimes apt to think that, if they could but see a miracle wrought in favour of religion, they would readily resign all their scruples, believe

S E R M O N IV. 121

lating to the future kingdom of the Messiah, are described by one or other of those holy men of God, with such precision, and particularity, as cannot but fill the mind with astonishment, when we discover the prediction and the event bearing the most minute correspondence. Delivered in ages remote from the time of completion, and the subject of their prophecy being altogether improbable, according to all human ideas,

believe without doubt, and obey without reserve. The very thing that you desire you have. You have the greatest and most striking of miracles, in the series of Scripture prophecies, accomplished. And this is not a transient miracle, ceasing almost as soon as performed, but is permanent, and protracted through the course of many generations. It is not a miracle delivered only upon the report of others, but is subject to your own inspection, and examination. It is not a miracle exhibited only before a certain number of witnesses, but is open to the observation, and contemplation of all mankind, and after so many ages is still growing, still improving to future ages. What stronger miracle, therefore, can any man require for his conviction. Alas! whoever rejects this evidence, *neither would he be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.*" See Newton on the Prophecies, vol. iii. page 444.

we cannot suppose it to arise from any effects of foresight, or penetration. Nor can it be said, with any colour of reason, that the prediction was written after the accomplishment of the event *. It is only to be accounted for as proceeding from the powerful and immediate inspiration of Almighty God. And as such, therefore, it stamps, with the strongest seal of truth, the cause to which it is intended to bear evidence, for *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy* †.

If we look into those inspired writings with a view to answer the more immediate object of our present pursuit, the great question will be, under what character the Jews

* This argument, weak as it is, hath indeed been brought by the foes of Christianity against the evidences of it, arising from prophecy; but it carries with it its own confutation. Whoever wishes to see this, and all other objections against the testimony of prophecy, fully answered, may consult Dr. Lardner's first volume of his Supplement of the Credibility of the Gospel History, and Dr. Jortin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, vol. i. page 72.

† Revelations xix. 10

were

were taught by their prophets to expect the promised Messiah, and what were to be the specific marks of his person and offices?

It may well be supposed the appearance of such an august Being upon the theatre of this world, and who was coming on that grand embassy to save and restore a fallen race, must have had some more striking, and prominent features by which he might be known. If the divine œconomy thought the object important enough to typify and predict it through a long course of ages, it is but reasonable to suppose, also, that those types and prophecies must have particularly shadowed the outlines of his person and character.

Let us search the sacred records once more for information on this point, and see what were the individual characters which the Scriptures of the prophets taught mankind to look for, in the great Saviour of the world.

It is well known, and therefore needless to be insisted on in this place, that the prospect
of

of a Messiah was the leading principle of the Jewish religion. Through the many intermediate ages from the promise of this deliverer, to the period of his appearance, the minds of men were continually occupied with the expectation of this auspicious event. Every thing ceremonial in the service of the Jews, was, for the most part, typical or figurative of it. I pass over the general features by which the Messiah was described, and by which Jesus of Nazareth identified his claim to that character. Neither the precise time of his appearance, nor the circumstances by which that appearance was to be distinguished and known, as answering to the spirit of prophecy, are immediate to my present purpose. In this point all Christians of every denomination are agreed, and it is needless, therefore, to dwell upon them. The great and only object now in view is to ascertain, if possible, what was to be the real character of the promised Messiah, according to the language of prophecy; and I shall have no further recourse to the Scriptures of the prophets, than

than as they tend to the illustration of this important article.

Among the writings of those inspired men, we find the Messiah so minutely described, under one or other of his offices, that an attentive mind cannot help being struck when he beholds the wonderful vein of prophecy which runs through the whole of their works. Some of them so very plain and obvious, that even an ordinary reader, who considers them in a prophetic sense, must be instantly led to make application of them to the person of our blessed Lord. Others, indeed, are rather hidden and obscure, and such as we should not have been able, with any precision, or certainty, to have known Christ by, if the Apostles, in their expositions of those Scriptures, under the assistance of the Spirit of God, had not pointed out their allusion. Those who have leisure and ability to go through the whole of the prophecies on this important subject, will find enough to excite their admiration, and confirm their conviction;

viction : but I am necessarily limited to selections only.

And of these the first place is due, in priority of time, to the predictions of David.

He speaks of Christ, in his book of Psalms, under so many and various particulars, of his incarnation, his sufferings, his death, and exaltation, at the right-hand of power, that it would extend the subject much beyond what I propose, to bring before you every prediction we meet with in his writings, which hath a clear reference to the person of our Lord.

If the second Psalm can be supposed to have any prophetic meaning, nothing can be more to the purpose in proof of the divinity of him to whom it is applicable. The anointed of the Lord is there said to be *the King of Zion*, and *the Son of God*, whose inheritance was to be *over the heathen*, and his possessions to extend *to all the kingdoms of the world*. Similar to this, in the 89th Psalm, we find the same person predicted
under

under the title of *the Holy One*, and *one that is mighty*, and declared to be God's *first-born*, *higher than the kings of the earth*. And that these things were not spoken of David himself, but as a type of the Messiah, is evident, both from the expressions made use of, and the characters by which he is distinguished. For David, in his highest glory, could not be called the *Holy One*, and the *mighty*. Nor could he possibly possess those properties ascribed to the King of Zion. Nor did the ancient Jews, indeed, ever consider them as applicable to any but their expected deliverer. But had we any doubts remaining to whom the whole referred, the Apostles, Paul and John, would immediately remove them; for the one calls Christ the *first-born of every creature**; and the other, *King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*†.

The children singing songs of triumph before our Lord at his entrance into Jerusalem which the Psalmist predicted, (8th

* Colos. i. 15.

† Rev. xix. 16.

Psalm);

Pſalm); his perſecutions by the princes of the earth (22. 69.) ; the reproaches, and ſufferings ſuſtained by his ſacred perſon ; the circumſtances which attended his crucifixion; the foldiers piercing his ſide ; the parting his garments, and caſting lots for his veſture : nay, the very words our Lord uſed in thoſe trying moments (Pſalm 22), All theſe particulars, and many more to the ſame purpoſe *, which we find in the writings of this Prophet, and which are either by our Lord himſelf, or his Apoſtles, declared to refer to him, clearly imply a ſuperiority of this nature whom they predicted.

But above all, the reſurrection of Jeſus from the dead, his aſcenſion into heaven, and his poſſeſſion of an eternal throne, at the right-hand of power ; theſe are ſuch predictions as, when explained by the correſponding events, can leave no room to doubt the divinity of that perſon to whom

* See 110th Pſalm, and compare the 40th with 10th chapter of Hebrews.

they

they referred, and in whom they are accomplished. When we hear, therefore, the royal Prophet declaring the impossibility of the Messiah's seeing *corruption*, and find the Apostle Peter applying this prophecy so expressly to Christ, in his first sermon after the descent of the Holy Ghost *: when again, we read the magnificent description the prophet hath given of *his ascending up on high, leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men*; and see the whole verified in the day of our Lord's ascension; and his sending down the gifts of his Holy Spirit on his followers at the feast of Pentecost †: and when the prophet says of him, *Thy name, O God, is for ever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre*: and behold the very words quoted by an infallible expositor that cannot be mistaken, and without hesitation applied to him whom he calls *God's eternal*

* I stay not to quote the passages: compare Psalm xvi. with Acts ii.

† Compare Psalm lxviii. with Ephesians iv.

Son, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person * : I would ask any candid and ingenuous mind, what possible ideas we can annex to such qualities but those which are divine ? and therefore what less than a divine being could the Prophet have meant to predict, in the promised Messiah ?

From David let us pass on to Isaiah, who, from the great variety of events, as well as the striking particulars he hath spoken of, when sketching the out-lines of the Messiah's character, is by way of eminence distinguished by the title of the Evangelical Prophet. Such, indeed, are the writings of this wonderful man, on the subject of Christ's person and offices, that as an elegant writer expresses it, " The most striking scenes of our Lord's passion are delineated by the Prophet's pencil, with the same truth and exactness as if they had been drawn on the spot, when the secret volume

* Compare Psalm xlv. with Hebrews i.

of the divine decrees was unrolled, and when that which had been foreseen in vision was exhibited in reality.*"

The Prophet begins his description of the person of the future Messiah, with the nicest discrimination of character, when predicting his miraculous conception. *Behold* (says he) *a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.* An Angel hath testified the application of this prophecy in the person of Jesus, and an Apostle hath recorded the fact itself of its being accomplished. *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet †.*

In another chapter, Isaiah again foretels the birth of the Messiah, and with such additional marks of divinity which he ascribes to him, as impress the mind with the fullest conviction of the greatness of his character to whom they belong. *Unto us* (says he) *a child is born, unto us a Son is given,*

* See White's Sermons, page 322

† Compare Isaiah vii. 14. with Matthew i. 22.

and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful ; Counsellor ; The Mighty God ; The Everlasting Father ; The Prince of Peace ; of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end *. What a cluster of attributes and titles of divinity is here ! Although I believe there is not a single perfection belonging to the Supreme Father, but what in one part or other of sacred Scripture, is equally applied to the Son, yet in this verse the incommunicable characters of deity, shine out like a full constellation. The inspired writer appears to want words to denote *the fulness of him who filleth all in all* †. How could the Prophet be so daring and presumptuous as to describe the Messiah under such great and eternal properties, if after all, no more than a mere man, was expected in him ? Would he have said this of any, even of the highest and greatest of all created beings ? Could such attributes, in the smallest degree, be ap-

* Isaiah ix. 6.

† Ephes. i. 23.

plicable to any less than the Great Supreme? and what then were the expectations of the Jews, from the predictions of Isaiah, of the character of their Messiah?

The same Prophet, after having enumerated those wonderful properties of the nature of the Messiah, goes on to mention other particulars, descriptive of his person and offices. He foretels the herald which should usher in his approach, the name and title by which he should be proclaimed, the manner of his appearance, and the great events by which his life would be distinguished. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make strait in the desert an highway for our God*. Lift up thy voice, be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God †! Behold your God will come and save you, then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue*

* Isaiah xl. 3.

† Isaiah xl. 9.

of the dumb shall sing *. Observe these expressions, I beseech you, and then turn to the Evangelists history of the life of Jesus, and behold the correspondence of the prediction with the event! Recollect what the Prophet hath said, that it was *their God* that was to come and save them, *when the eyes of the blind were opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped*, and then view the blessed Redeemer of mankind going about the streets of Jerusalem, continually performing those gracious works of mercy, and referring the messengers of John the Baptist to those very actions, as proofs that he was the character predicted, and then determine, what stronger proofs can be required of the divinity of his person in whom all these properties were united.

Nor will the predictions of the other Prophets concerning the Messiah be found less expressive of his nature and dignity, though they are not so diffuse and particular, as those of David or Isaiah.

* Compare Isaiah xxxv. 4. with Matthew xi. 2—6.

What

What less than a divine being did *Jeremiah* teach the Jews to look for in their expected deliverer, when he declared the name by which he should be known was the incommunicable name of the great *Jehovah*? *This is the name (says he) whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness* *.

* Jeremiah xxiii. 6.—We are very much indebted to Doctor Eveleigh (the present Provost of Oriel College) for rescuing this text of Scripture from the perverted sense a late publication would have made of it. By a reference to the parallel passage in the 33d chap. of the same prophecy, the meaning which the LXX. have given it is rendered clear and evident. And Dr. E. justly merits our thanks for his learned remarks upon the occasion. See the Appendix to his two sermons preached before the University of Oxford, 1791.

The prophecy of Ezekiel I have not noticed. There does not appear any thing very striking in this man's writings alluding to the person of Christ, descriptive of a divine nature. He speaks indeed of the Messiah as the *King* and *Shepherd* of Zion, and our Lord assumes the latter of these characters, particularly, when declaring himself the *good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep*. But after the more pointed quotations which have been made from the other prophets, this of Ezekiel becomes the less necessary.

What character could the Prophet *Daniel* expect he was to appear in, whom he describes as the *son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, and to whom there was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, and whom all people and nations should serve, whose dominion was to be an everlasting dominion* *.

This Prophet, also, in a very particular manner, declares the precise time of the Messiah's appearing, and of his being cut off, together with the great end of his sacrificial merits and death, all which were literally fulfilled, according to his predictions, in the person of Christ; but I mention these things only as additional proofs, to whom the Prophet evidently referred, from those corresponding circumstances.

The Prophet *Micah* hath so clearly defined the person and character of our Lord, in that memorable prophecy which points to the very spot which was to give birth to the Redeemer, that no one who ad-

* Compare Daniel vii. 13, 14. with Matthew xxiv. 30.
mits

mits the prediction to have a reference to Jesus Christ, can hesitate in believing also that it ascribes divinity to him whom it predicted. *Thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting* *. If this passage can be supposed to have reference to the expected Messiah (and we have the testimony of the Jewish scriptures, in full proof of this opinion, (Matth. ii. John vii. 42.) it plainly follows, that this Messiah, whom the Jews were taught to look for, was a being possessed of an eternal nature, *whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*.

And if *Haggai* means any thing by that remarkable prophecy, that the glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former †, it could only be derived from the divinity of *his* presence who appeared in it during his incarnation; for

* Micah v. 2.

† Haggai ii. 6, 9.

we read in Scripture, that the second temple was so far inferior to the first, that many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the Fathers, who were antient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of the second was laid before their eyes, *wept with a loud voice* *.

But *Zechariah* hath yet more particularly defined the character of the expected Messiah, by that spirit of prophecy with

* *Ezra* ii. 12. The Jews have themselves observed five distinguishing excellencies in the first temple which the second wanted; namely, 1st, The Urim and Thummim, by which the high-priest received instructions in the will of God. 2dly, The ark of the covenant, from whence the voice of the Lord was heard. 3dly, The fire upon the altar, which came down from heaven, and consumed the sacrifice. 4thly, The divine presence manifested by a shining glory; and, 5thly, The spirit of prophecy. And, added to these, as the building of the second temple in point of ornament and structure was, in the eyes of the people, as nothing in comparison of the first, how was the divine promise completed by filling this house with glory, according to the prophecy of *Haggai*, unless by the visible appearance of him to whom it was dedicated? See *Pearson on the Creed*, page 83,

which

which he wrote, when he says, *Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for lo I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee* *. Here are evidently very discriminating marks by which the Messiah's character should be ascertained. He is called the *Lord*, and said to be sent by the *Lord of Hosts*. By which the incommunicable name of Jehovah is equally applied both to the supreme Father, and to the Son. And to express this still more in a subsequent part of his prophecy, he uses this remarkable language: *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered*. Our Lord himself hath so clearly explained this prophecy, that the sense and application of it cannot be doubted. And what then shall we conclude his nature to have

* Zechariah ii. 10, 11,

been who is called *fellow* to the *Lord of Hosts* * ?

I will detain you but with one quotation more from the predictions of the Prophets on this subject, and that is of *Malachi*, who lived about three hundred and fifty years before Christ's advent, and with whose prophecy the sacred volume of the Old Testament closes. *Behold* (says he) *I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to HIS temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in, behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts* †. That this prophecy refers to the person of our Lord, and his harbinger John the Baptist, will not, I believe, be doubted. The question, then, arising from hence is, what less than a divine being were the Jews taught to look for, in one whose way his fore-runner proclaimed to be *the way of the Lord*; and who when he came, was to come as *the*

* Compare Zechariah xiii. 7. with Matthew xxvi. 31. and Mark xiv. 27.

† Compare Malachi iii. 1. with Matthew iii. 1. *et seq.*

Lord to his temple? How should it be called *his* temple unless he was the Lord of it; and to whom but *God himself* could a temple be dedicated?

Now, then, review those evidences, arising from the predictions of the Prophets, coolly and impartially; and then say under what character the great Deliverer of Israel was to appear. If language be at all to be depended upon, and the Holy Spirit which guided the Prophet's pen be supposed free from error, no one truth can be more clearly revealed, nor any one fact more fully assured to us, than that the possession of divine attributes was to be the distinguishing feature of his nature and person. And how any man, in the face of those Scriptures, can be presumptuous enough decidedly to assert, that the Jews never looked for, nor were they taught to expect, any other than a man like themselves in their Messiah, is incredible indeed *!

But

* Dr. Priestley, in his History of the Early Opinions concerning Christ, expresses himself to the following purpose:

But though the Prophets predicted the future Saviour under those great and eternal distinctions which could only belong to a divine Being, yet they as expressly described certain characters, and qualities at the same time, by which he should be known, and which as evidently demonstrated an human nature.

Though it was said of him, that he should be *a Prince which should reign over all, and of his kingdom there should be no end*; though *the Gentiles were to come to his light, and Kings to the brightness of his rising*; yet no less was *this desire of all nations, this Lord of his temple, to be a man of sorrows, and*

pose: "The Jews (says he) were taught by their Prophets to expect a Messiah, who was to be descended from the tribe of Judah, and the family of David—a person in whom themselves and all the nations of the earth should be blessed; but none of their Prophets gave them any idea of any other than a man like themselves in that illustrious character, and no other did they ever expect, or do they expect to this day."—See Letters addressed to Soame Jenyns, Esq. containing strictures on the Writings of Edward Gibbon, Esq. Dr. Priestley, &c. page 152.

acquainted

acquainted with grief; he was to pour out his soul unto death; he was to give his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. When we saw him, there was nothing that we should desire him, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. He was to be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; to be led as a lamb to the slaughter; to be taken from prison, and from judgment; and to be cut off out of the land of the living.

Predictions so seemingly contradictory in one and the same character, required somewhat more than human comprehension to unravel, before the events foretold were accomplished. Accordingly, the ancient Jews, unable to reconcile them, universally rejected the idea of a suffering Messiah, and fondly embraced that which flattered their notions of worldly greatness, by looking for a triumphant Saviour. But their ignorance and perpetual perversion of the Scriptures do not prevent more enlightened and dispassionate minds (and especially when enabled to judge
from

from the events now in a great measure fulfilled) from seeing things in a different point of view. We perceive in those Scriptures, clear and manifest declarations of the union of two distinct characters in one and the same person. The Messiah was evidently to be *Emmanuel, God with us*, and no less *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. And well might the Prophet, wrapt in the contemplation of so mysterious a character, declare his name should be called *wonderful*; for beheld, in any light, either as God or man, or as God and man, he is altogether wonderful*.

I have dwelt so largely in reciting the quotations from the Prophets, to shew the specific marks of the *divine* nature by which the Messiah, it was said, should be distinguished, that I cannot trespass longer upon your time in more particularly selecting those which describe him under his manhood. On

* See an admirable Treatise on our Lord's Titles and Characters illustrated, entitled, *Horæ Solitariae*. See also Jortin's Sermons, vol. vi. p. 230.

this point, indeed, it is less necessary to enlarge. Our brethren who differ from us in opinion respecting the divinity of our Lord, will not require proofs, I believe, of his humanity. I would only beg it may be remembered, therefore, that we are equally anxious with them to preserve the belief of Christ's human nature, as the doctrine of Scripture, and an essential article of salvation. While we glory in the gracious plan of redemption by Christ, that the Lord laid *help upon one that is mighty*, and sent his Son *to be the Saviour of the world*, it is the peculiar joy, also, and consolation of our hearts, that this blessed Redeemer, when he came upon this beneficent errand, *took not upon him the nature of angels, but was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people* *.

I have now finished the single object proposed in this discourse, having selected a few of the most striking passages from the

* Heb. ii. 16. and iv. 15.

Prophets, (and I hope sufficient to the purpose), to shew what were the leading characters their Scriptures taught mankind to expect in the promised Messiah. And from these premises, the fair conclusion deducible is obvious. As those unerring oracles of holy writ, penned under the immediate inspiration of God, have very clearly revealed, that an unity of nature, divine and human, should constitute the expected Redeemer; if Jesus Christ be no more than man, he answers not to this prediction, and consequently is not the true Messiah: But if, in the person of our Lord, we evidently trace marks of this mysterious union, then have we confidence to conclude that he is the promised Saviour, *to whom give all the Prophets witness* *.

With these discriminating characters in view, let us now direct our inquiry unto the Gospel; and, under the gracious assistance of that blessed Spirit whom we humbly trust hath hitherto guided our researches, and will accompany our future progress through

* Acts x. 43.

this subject, let us examine, and with the most scrupulous exactness, whether our Lord brought with him those infallible marks by which his claims to the person and offices of the Messiah should be ascertained and known.—But this, with divine permission, must be the subject of the next discourse.

S E R M O N V.

JOHN i. 14.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

IN the prosecution of the important subject which hath lately requested your attention, I come now to those manifestations of divinity which distinguished the person of Jesus during his incarnation.

The result of our enquiry, in the preceding discourse concerning the testimony of the Prophets in their predictions of the Messiah, was found to be altogether descriptive of a great but humble Saviour. Though it was the *God of Israel* that was to come and save them, when *the eyes of the blind*

blind were opened, and the tongue of the dumb to sing *, yet was he to be at the same time a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief †. Though the Gentiles were to come to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising ‡, yet it was said of him no less, that he should give his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hide not his face from shame and spitting ||. This enigmatical prophecy, so apparently irreconcilable to the apprehensions of the human mind, was nevertheless literally fulfilled when Christ appeared upon earth. The mysterious union of our Lord's nature, which the Evangelist declares in the words of the text, fully reconciles the seeming contradiction. Hence his description of the person of Jesus. After having ascribed to him all the great, and distinguishing characters of divinity, that he was *the Word which was from the beginning with God, and was God; that all things were*

* Isaiah xxxv. 4, 5, 6.

† Isaiah liii.

‡ Isaiah lx. 3.

|| Isaiah l. 6.

made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made * ; he next sub-joins the testimony of his incarnation; *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

With this description of the Messiah in our hand, we are now to enter upon that æra, in which our blessed Lord made his appearance, when the minds of men were raised to the highest pitch in expectation of the coming Saviour.

The first object of my present discourse will be to examine (as was proposed) what correspondence the character of Jesus bears to the promised prediction, and whether our Lord brought with him those criteria by which the Messiah should be known.

At this season (the precise time the Prophets had foretold) the Angel Gabriel was sent to the city of Nazareth, to announce to a virgin called Mary, tidings of the mi-

* John i. 1, 2, 3.

raculous conception: thus confirming and illustrating the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah, *Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us* *.

The particulars of this wonderful embassy are thus related by the Evangelist. *And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God: and behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered, and*

* Isaiah vii. 14.

*said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word, And the angel departed from her *.*

An event of so singular a nature requires somewhat more than ordinary proof to procure the conviction and belief of mankind. It is not from the testimony of the virgin herself, nor even the authority of the sacred historian, though coming with all the evidences of divine inspiration, from whence we can expect an hearty assent from the pride of human understanding. There must be somewhat more than these to satisfy scrupulous minds. But when we find concurrent circumstances, and in such instances as defeat all suspicions of collusion or deceit; the correspondence of ancient prophecy with the accomplishment of the fact itself; the message of an angel, attested by the Spirit of God, guiding the pen of

* Luke i. 28—38.

the Evangelist, and the whole illustrated by all the subsequent acts of the Redeemer's life, surely there ought to be no hesitation, with all modest and impartial persons, in receiving the truth of the miraculous conception as an article of religious belief,

As this, however, is so very important a point, in ascertaining the real dignity and character of our blessed Lord, and will best help us to form a true idea of the wonderful events with which his ministry was distinguished; you will not think it foreign to my present purpose, if I enter somewhat more particularly into the evidences of the miraculous incarnation.

The first circumstance worthy observation in proof of it, ariseth from the prediction of ancient prophecy. It was the express language of the Prophet Isaiah, when predicting the advent of the Messiah, that he should be born of a virgin. *A virgin shall conceive and bear a son**; which

* Compare Isaiah vii. 14. with Luke i. 35. and Matthew i. 22.

evidently

evidently implied a miraculous conception, even if the Evangelist, who declares the incarnation of Jesus, had not noticed it. And that no possible misapprehension might arise from the application of this prophecy to the person of our Lord, we find an angel was not only sent to the Virgin, to give her the previous notice of this supernatural impregnation, but also a *visional* intimation was delivered to Joseph, her intended husband, in a dream, applying this very passage of the prophecy to the case of the Virgin, and declaring, that *all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet* *.

The second proof of the miraculous incarnation is the testimony of the sacred historian, who hath so circumstantially related it. The Evangelist, St. Luke, independently of his inspired authority, deserves our attention the more from several weighty particulars with which he has prefaced his narration. He wrote his gospel, he says,

* Matthew i. 22.

purposely because he had a more perfect understanding of all things from the very first, (relating to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ;) and forasmuch as many had taken in hand to set forth in order, a declaration of those things which were most surely believed among them, even those who were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word, it seemed good to him also to write of the same *. And in this very chapter, in which he hath related the circumstances of the wonderful impregnation of Mary, he speaks of another angelic embassy to Zacharias, together with the event and completion of that mission. All which, had any of the facts mentioned been thought questionable, would have invalidated the rest, and rendered the whole history liable to contradiction. And the more so, as this is the first instance upon record of an immediate revelation, for more than three hundred years from the time the spirit of prophecy ceased with the last of the prophets, Malachi. So that in the relation

* Luke i. 1. 4.

of this sacred writer, we have the strongest human testimony to prove the correspondence of the fact itself with the thing predicted *.

But, thirdly, The miraculous incarnation of Jesus derives its certainty not only from the prediction of prophecy, and the corresponding event assured to us in the testimony of the sacred historian, but the necessity of the thing itself implies it, in order that Christ might answer the great end of his mission and character.

Notwithstanding some professors of Christianity are so exceedingly anxious to strip the gospel of its principal doctrine of atonement through the blood of Jesus, yet nothing can be more plain and evident than that the Prophets, in their declarations of

* I beg the reader to observe, that I have taken no notice of the *inspiration* with which the Evangelist wrote his gospel, for on this supposition, all further argument would be unnecessary. I am now considering the evidence of his authority simply as an historian writing of a matter of fact, and even from hence I conceive the supernatural birth of our Lord to be fully proved.

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the future Saviour, foretold of a *suffering* Messiah, who should make his soul *an offering for sin*, who was to be *wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities*, by *whose stripes we should be healed*, and on whom the Lord would lay the iniquity of us all *. That when the weeks were determined to anoint the Most Holy, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, the Messiah should be cut off, but not for himself †. These plain predictions of the great objects to be accomplished by the sacrificial merits, and death of the Messiah, loudly proclaimed the expediency of a miraculous conception; for had this not been the case, had our Lord been produced by the ordinary course of things, in consequence of Mary's marriage with her husband, partaking then of the common nature which was universally corrupt, and fallen, the offering of himself, as a pure, and unblemished sacrifice for sin, would have been impossible; and hence the character of Christ, according to the

* Isaiah liii.

† Dan. ix. 24. *et seq.*

predictions of the prophets, would have been defective in one of the most important offices of the Messiah. Whereas now, the sufferings and death of Jesus, so exactly corresponding to the spirit of prophecy, become an additional evidence of our Lord's wonderful incarnation, and both confirm, and illustrate each other.

But, lastly, What gives the finishing proof of the miraculous conception, is the wonderful events which followed in the Redeemer's life; for upon no other consideration can we reconcile many of the actions displayed by our Lord, but the supposition that he derived his being in a way different from the ordinary means of generation among men.

It would be a digression, in some sort, from the main object now before us, to enter into the detail of those actions of Christ, in order to establish this doctrine. (And, indeed, the observations I have to make on them will more properly meet us in another part of this discourse, when I come to prove the divinity of Jesus from his illustrious

ous deeds, which every where proclaimed it.) But all I would wish to remark at present is this ; that when we find the account of the Evangelist of the supernatural impregnation of Mary, so minutely verifying the predictions of the Prophets concerning the birth of the Messiah ; and again, this very circumstance leading to the accomplishment of an event, foretold as one of the distinguishing offices of the Messiah, by which alone the promised Saviour could become a proper sacrifice for sin ; and, lastly, when we behold, in the subsequent acts of our Lord's life, such a series of conduct as clearly and decidedly prove a nature superior to every former prophet, or teacher ; it is but reasonable to conclude, that his birth must have been miraculous, which was produced from the overshadowing power of the Highest, and evidently without the intervention of an human father.

Nor is there any thing incredible in the thing itself to those who will admit, what the angel declared to be the case, the interposition of divine energy in the operation

tion of the Holy Ghost. And the very idea of a miracle pre-supposes this agency. Let us imagine only, what the most presumptuous sceptic cannot deny, that the same great power which created the first man from nothing, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, possesses the same ability to produce another man, without the natural means he hath appointed for the continuation of the species; on this supposition it will not appear more surprizing that Christ should be born of a virgin, without an human father, than that Adam should be at first formed out of the dust of the ground. In both cases it is the exertion of a supernatural agency; and the very embassy of an angel, in the case of Mary's impregnation, implied some important purpose wherefore this singular event was to be accomplished. They who are not already converts to the Atheistical creed of the world's eternity, or ready to join the scoffers the Apostle speaks of, who deride the promise of Christ's future coming to judgment, because they conceive *all things to continue as they were from*
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the beginning of the creation *, must admit there was a time when man began to be; the birth of Jesus, therefore, is not the first instance of an immediate existence without the usual means of generation.

Such are the evidences of the miraculous incarnation of our Lord; and I hope they will appear sufficiently conclusive and satisfactory, to establish your hearts in the firm belief of this fundamental principle of the gospel, on the truth of which depend those important doctrines which peculiarly distinguish the Christian religion. Give up this article of your creed, say that Jesus is the son of Joseph, and you give up with it, at once, all the hopes of true believers. Then the great doctrine of atonement, and the cross of Christ, fall to the ground. That *cross*, which the Apostle Paul *so much gloried in* †, and which *he determined to know nothing beside* ‡: the *cross* which is marked on our forehead as the very seal and badge of our profession: all is rendered trifling

* 2 Peter iii. 4. † Galat. vi. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

and nugatory ; *our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins* *.

It is not paying Christ the officious empty compliment that he was the greatest of all teachers, and of prophets ; this is but a poor recompence for robbing him of his most endearing character ; the Redeemer of the world. That Christ was a teacher, come from God, and infinitely surpassing all that were before him, is too plain to be denied. We feel conviction of the divinity of his religion, by the purity of his doctrine. But, were these all the ends the Son of God came upon earth to accomplish, wretched would be still the hopes of fallen man. What more eminently recommends his gospel to our hearts is the provision it makes for the most material wants of our nature, in *redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins* † ; *that he made our peace through the blood of his cross* ‡. And for the sins of life *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and*

* Cor. xv. 17. † Ephes. i. 7. ‡ Colos. i. 20.

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he is the propitiation for our sins *. These are the grand and essential points in our holy faith, and therefore let me beg of you in terms equal to their importance, to remain firm and unshaken in the belief of them. Review again, and again, the evidences of the miraculous incarnation of Jesus. Behold a spirit of prophesy, declaring ages before it came to pass, the conception of the Virgin, and the birth of the Messiah. See the event exactly fulfilled at the time predicted, in the person of our Lord: and when you have fully impressed your mind with the proper conviction due to these undeniable testimonies, then go on, and attend to that wonderful train of conduct which followed in the life of Christ, discriminating him from every other being merely human: and then determine whether such an happy concurrence of circumstances does not clearly ascertain the real dignity and character of our blessed Master. — You cannot but conclude with the

* 1 John ii. 1, 2.

Prophet, that he was *Emmanuel, God with us*; or, as the Apostle emphatically called him, *God manifest in the flesh* *.

Convinced, then, that the birth of Jesus was miraculous, we no longer wonder when we hear him asserting his relationship with the supreme Father, and behold events in his life every way demonstrable of the divinity of his person. Nor from being equally assured, at the same time, that he was of the *seed of the woman* †, are we astonished to find actions suitable to such an offspring. This unity of nature in the person of our Lord, serves to explain what otherwise would be unaccountable, and even contradictory. The Prophets which described the Messiah under the greatest and most lofty distinctions, foretold also that *he should grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; that he had no form or comeliness, and when we should see him there was no beauty that we should desire him* ‡. Hence, therefore, when we read in the

* 1 Tim. iii. 3. 16. † Gal. iv. 4. ‡ Isa. liii. 2.

history of Jesus, *that the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit; that he increased in wisdom and in stature* *; that he was subject to all the wants, and infirmities of our nature; *of hunger, and thirst, and cold, and weariness*; was *afflicted and troubled in spirit*; was open to impressions of joy and sorrow: in short, that he was a man, and felt as a man, upon all occasions; let not these things stagger your faith in the divinity of Jesus. Recollect that these are the very circumstances the Prophets taught us to expect. The proofs of our Lord's humanity, when connected with the testimonies of his divinity also, are no less proofs of his being the Messiah. This unity of nature is the very criterion of his character. Had Christ wanted this evidence, though coming in all the power of the Highest, and bringing with him every other credential of his being the Son of God, yet would he not have answered the description the Prophets had given of the Messiah, unless,

* Luke ii. 52.

at the same time, he came as the son of man.

The want of attending to those discriminating characters by which the Messiah was to be known, is the great, and perhaps the only cause of all that unhappy dissension in the church of Christ, concerning the real dignity of our blessed Redeemer. Alas ! that ever Christians should have read the Scriptures with so little discernment after *Jesus hath sent his angel to testify unto the churches, that he is both the root and the offspring of David* *. As the *root*, his pre-existence proves his divinity ; and as the *offspring*, it effectually shews his humanity : and both together form the united qualities which were to constitute the Messiah. Whatever we meet with in the expressions of Christ or his Apostles, when speaking of our Lord as a man, so far from lessening the Redeemer's character in our esteem, ought to confirm our faith the more, for it clearly and unequivocally proves him to be

* Revelations xxii. 16.

the Messiah, of whom these things are said. Did the sacred writers indeed represent him as a man *only*, and no more, the case would be different. He would then be deficient in one part of the character predicted, and consequently, could not be the Messiah. But we have already seen how amply the servants of our Lord have borne testimony to his divinity * ; and we as readily, and as cheerfully receive their testimony also to the proofs they give of his humanity ; for it is from both we derive our assurance that Jesus is the Christ.

How mysterious soever this unity may appear in one and the same person, it is evident that the great end of our Redeemer's mission could not have been accomplished without it. And the question why so awful a dispensation became necessary for the purpose of our redemption, as the incarnation of the Son of God, will only give rise to others of the like nature, which are easier asked than explained. In short, in

* See the Second Sermon,

this, as well as many other cases, we perceive that *God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways* *. The preaching of the cross, and Christ crucified, was to the Jews of old a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; and so it will still appear to the wisdom of this world; but, as an Apostle assures us, to *them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, it is Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God* †.

The events which followed in the life of Jesus, correspond with his miraculous incarnation. The mysterious volume opens with *God manifest in the flesh* ‡; and every page in the sacred history carries with it some evidence of the same awful subject. Did it come within the limits or design of my present plan, it would be easy to bring forward a great variety of circumstances of this kind which occur in the Evangelists. But this would necessarily lead me to be too diffuse, and particular. I must, therefore, adopt a method more comprehensive. And

* *Ist.* iv. 8. † *1 Cor.* i. 23, 24. ‡ *1 Tim.* iii. 16.

as I persuade myself I am now addressing a body of Christians, who are no strangers to our Lord's history, it will be sufficient to select such passages only, in the life of Christ, as may be demonstrative of the great point in question.

It will answer every purpose, therefore, to shew, that there are certain particulars in the person of Christ, which set him at an infinite distance from the highest, and most exalted characters among the sons of men, whether prophets, or teachers, which have ever appeared in the world. That from the first moment of his entrance on his public office, when a voice from heaven proclaimed the dignity of his person, to the last hour of his beneficial ministry; the miracles he performed; the language he assumed; the attributes he possessed; the titles by which he is every where distinguished in Scripture; that great and awful sacrifice of his death, which he himself declared to be the immediate purpose of his mission; the conclusive scenes of his life; the solemn, and magnificent events which followed

followed his death ; his glorious resurrection and ascension ; the fulfilment of the promise he made to his followers before his departure, of sending down the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts ; the assurance of his return again at the last day to judgment ; and the expectation he taught mankind to entertain, of a future, and invisible world ; such views of Christ, (and they are but the mere outlines of a portrait which the Evangelists have drawn, under divine assistance of the Son of God,) impress the mind with an awful idea of the greatness and sanctity of his character whom they represent, and justly render him the object of gratitude, adoration, and praise, to all generations of the Christian church,

To enter into a minute description of these particulars would require a separate discourse, or rather a series of discourses : either of which is inadmissible in the present work. I shall only beg your attention to such of the more prominent features which appear in them in the life of Jesus, as may the best enable us to ascertain his real character. And among the evidences of this kind,

kind which I conceive necessary to bring forward in proof of his divinity, the first place is due to that large and extensive chain of miracles which he performed; because our blessed Lord himself, upon all occasions, particularly referred to them, as carrying with them the fullest proofs of a divine power, in the unity he possessed with the Supreme Father.

Miracles, in confirmation of a doctrine, and as a sanction to the truth of what they are intended to testify, are not peculiar to the ministry of Jesus. Under the Old Testament, many servants of the Lord brought the same credentials with them. Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, and others, are instances of this kind: they frequently appealed to the wonderful works they wrought, as proofs that what they said and did, was by divine appointment. Hence, therefore, the miracles which our Lord performed, considered abstractedly, though surpassing both in greatness, and in number, whatever had preceded them, do not prove his divinity; but it is the *manner*, the *declarations* which accompanied

accompanied them, and the *personal authority* by which they were performed; these are the circumstances which so eminently separate the works of Jesus from any former prophet, and draw a most striking distinction between them. Such, indeed, as might reasonably be supposed to form a line of discrimination between the actions of the Lord and those of his servants. *They wrought wonders to display the glory of God; Jesus (it is said) to manifest his own*.*

Let us examine, in one or two particulars, the Scripture account of miracles, under this idea, for proof of what I am asserting.

The prophets and servants of the Lord invariably declared by whose authority, and in whose name they acted; and generally addressed God in a short and expressive prayer, suitable to the moment, when about to perform some supernatural operation. This is visible, more or less, through the

* *This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, (says St. John,) John ii. 11.*

whole Jewish history*. But with Christ matters were very differently conducted. It appears, that in all his mighty works, he was influenced by his own immediate will and authority. *Lord, (says a leper to him,) if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. I will; (says Jesus,) be thou clean*†. Here was no previous application to heaven, but the disposition in our Lord was immediate, and the deed instantly followed. Of the same kind is the miracle of Christ raising the widow of Nain's son. It is said, that *when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.*

* See Exod. viii. 12. and ix. 29—33. Joshua x. 12.
1 Sam. xii. 18. 1 Kings xvii. 20, 21.

† Matthew viii. 2. Dr. Sherlock justly observes on this miracle, that when our Lord said, *I will*, be thou clean, and the leper was immediately cleansed, his divinity shone forth more brightly, than if he had commanded all the powers above visibly to assist him. See his Discourses, vol. i. p. 64.

All this was done without any intimation that he wrought this by any other authority than his own *.

And among those who had faith to be healed of their diseases (which Christ was pleased sometimes to make the condition on which they should receive the benefit of his mercy,) it should seem they entertained the belief that Christ possessed this ability inherent in *himself*. Hence the poor woman in the throng said, *If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole* †. And to the same purport, the Centurion, *Speak the word only* (says he to Christ), *and my servant shall be healed* ‡. In these and numberless instances of the same kind §, we hear not a word of Jesus acting by the power of his Father *only*, but from his own personal authority in conjunction with it.

In the case of the resurrection of Lazarus from the grave, our blessed Lord, indeed, used a short prayer, addressed to his

* Luke vii. † Mark v. 28. ‡ Matth. viii. 8.

§ Such as the cleansing the ten lepers; the casting out devils, &c. &c.

Father,

Father, before he called him from the dead. But wherefore? Christ gave an immediate reason for it: *Because (says he) of the people which was standing by, I said it that they might believe that thou hast sent me**; that is, by this evident communication in the very moment of performing so illustrious an act as the raising of the dead, they might believe, what Christ had before asserted, that all he did was in perfect unity with God; that what things soever the Father doeth, *these also doeth the Son likewise. The Father is in me (says Christ,) and I in him; I and my Father are one.* In the resurrection of Lazarus there is something so truly unequalled in our Lord's *manner*, both before he wrought the miracle, and at the time of performing it, that it hardly needs a reference to any other event in his history for the proof of his divinity.

The solemn and authoritative discourse in which he proclaimed himself to be *the resurrection and the life*; and the miracle which

* John xi. 42.

immediately followed, an evidence, as it were, of the truth of his declaration; what criteria less than of divinity could these be! We read in Scripture, that prophets and messengers from God have occasionally been invested with ability to work events, truly miraculous, as the test of their commission. But what servant of Jehovah ever said of himself, *I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die. I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand**. There is something surely,

* John x. 28. In the verse following (the 29th), Christ uses much the same phrase in application to his Father. *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hands.* And elsewhere he says, *My Father is greater than I*, John xiv. 28. From this, and several similar texts, an argument hath been drawn to prove that Christ cannot be God, from this acknowledged inferiority. This objection hath been replied to by endeavouring to shew that when our Lord speaks at any time in this language,
it

surely, in these expressions, totally distinct from the words of any former Prophet,

it is to be considered as in reference to his *human* nature, and not his *divine*. But I confess, to my apprehension, this is by no means a satisfactory solution of the difficulty. It is certainly rather waving, than answering the question. For to suppose that our Lord in one passage alludes to his *divinity*, and in another to his *humanity*, this would be to make Christ speak and act as two distinct beings; which would be an absurdity. And if this were made the standard for explaining the difficulties of Scripture, to what errors would it lead! I rather think our blessed Lord meant exactly as the words express, *My Father is greater than I*. And that there is a pre-
 cedence in the Father, such as the priority of earthly parents may be supposed to possess, though at the same time the most perfect equality of nature remains. (It is to be lamented, the infirmity of language obliges us to the use of such terms as but very imperfectly express our ideas.) I cannot conceive the deity of Christ is in the smallest degree lessened by this concession. That there is some mysterious superiority in the Father, as Father, and inferiority in the Son, as Son, is not only the doctrine of Scripture, but hath the concurrent opinion of all the ancient writers; though in what manner this subsists, as Christ no less asserts, *I and my Father are one*, is, by its very nature, an inexplicable mystery.

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phet, and extremely difficult to be accounted for, on the presumption that Jesus, upon all these occasions, though speaking personally, meant nothing more than a derived power from his Father. Would Christ, (suppo-

But upon the supposition of it, our Lord's words are clear, and his meaning evident.

Whether this, however, be the best way of accounting for the phrase or not, yet I will be bold to say, that it is wholly unaccountable, on the Unitarian principles of Christ being but a mere man. For nothing would be more ridiculous than for Jesus, simply as a man, to say, *My Father is greater than I.* That *God is greater than man.* What a trifling with words would this be! And is it possible that any one can seriously suppose this of a perfect teacher? There must be some reason, it is to be supposed, for Christ making this comparative observation of his Father with himself; and as there would ever be so vast a disproportion between a being wholly finite, and the infinite Jehovah, (which would be the case on the idea of Christ being no more than man,) I think it impossible to suppose our Lord would have done it, but from the consciousness of a participation of nature. If this reasoning be well founded, this text of Scripture, which hath been always considered as the plainest and strongest in the New Testament, against the divinity of Jesus, is greatly in favour of it, and can only be properly explained upon these principles.

sing

sing him to be no more than man,) have distinguished himself by such eternal attributes, and spoken so confidently of his own power, without continually qualifying the expression with a proper caution in what sense it was to be understood that the whole was derivative, and that he himself was no more than the instrument of his Father? When we behold Christ, therefore, in this striking instance now under consideration, taking a title unknown before, calling himself *the resurrection and the life*; and immediately in proof of it bringing back a dead man from the grave, stopping the very principles of corruption in a lifeless mass, and causing him to re-assume animation: I cannot conceive such a manifestation of divine power to imply less than a divine agent; and as we justly infer omnipotence from the works of creation, so we may equally, in this instance, conclude it could only be the exertion of the same power in a resurrection: and both, we find, are ascribed to the Son of God.

Compare now the actions of the most favoured servants of God, with the wonderful miracles of our divine Lord, and see whether, in a single instance, any of them were distinguished in this manner. Did ever any prophet assume a language like that of Jesus, or give the least reason to suppose, as Christ hath done, that it was by virtue of an intimate union with the supreme Father his mighty works were all accomplished? Nay, do they not all of them expressly declare that every thing they said, or wrought, was in the name of the Lord? This circumstance, I conceive to be particularly striking, and proper to be well attended to, in our comparison of the miracles of Christ with those of the prophets; for it forms a manifest distinction between them, and such (as I before observed,) as may justly be supposed to discriminate the words, and actions of the Lord from those of his servants.

But, besides this discrimination in the *manner* by which our Lord wrought his miracles, some of them were of that *nature*,
also,

also, that they carry with them no possible resemblance to those of his servants.

When we read, that *Jesus went about doing good, healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people* * ; that *wheresoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment ; and as many as touched him were made perfectly whole* † . Wonderful as this description is, it gives but an imperfect idea of the greatness of Christ's character. But to have seen him casting out devils, bringing dæmoniacs instantly from a state of phrenzy to perfect calmness and composure, the dead resuming life at his command, and the waves of the sea becoming still at his voice ; Oh ! could an infidel have been present at scenes of this nature, which the Son of God daily performed, or could any of those who allow the religion of Jesus to be a revelation from heaven, but yet deny the di-

* Matth. iv. 23.

† Mark vi. 56.

vinity of him who brought it down to us; could they, I say, but have beheld our blessed Master thus continually exercising his power and authority, what irresistible conviction would have taken place in every mind * ! How admirably were the words
of

* I expect an objection to arise here, and therefore would wish to be prepared with an answer. If such conviction *must* have followed the display of Christ's miracles, how is it that these effects did not take place among the Jewish nation, before whom they were daily wrought? In the case of Lazarus particularly, though it is said, *Many of the Jews which were present, when they saw the miracle which Jesus did, believed on him; yet some went their way, and informed the Pharisees what Jesus had done; who, so far from becoming his disciples, sought the more to destroy him.* But wherefore was this? Evidently from the same principles which operate in the present hour: because it is difficult to dispossess long established prejudices: because it is hard to relinquish our opinions, and acknowledge ourselves to have been in error; and harder still to give up interest to truth. Had the rulers and the Pharisees become proselytes to our Lord, what a sacrifice must they have made! They must have relinquished all their long fond hopes of a temporal prince in their Messiah, and accepted one so humble in that character, that he frequently *had not where to lay his head.* They must have given up their authority, and
power,

of the Psalmist verified upon many of those occasions ! *The waters saw thee, O God; the waters saw thee, and were afraid, the depths also were troubled* *. *He ruleth both the raging of the sea, and the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people* †.

But chiefly, what raises Christ above all parallel, are the wonderful events which attended the conclusive scenes of our Lord's ministry; for these are evidently to be power, and learning, and placed themselves under the direction of him whom they had in derision called *the carpenter's son*. And what is yet worse than all, they must have forgiven all our Lord's pointed detection of their character, and received, with open arms, one who had branded them with the most odious names of hypocrites, and deceivers. And can any man, who knows what human nature is, wonder that the greatest, and most incontestible evidences of miracles, and daily repeated, should not produce this effect universally ? I say *universally*, for in some instances we know they absolutely over-ruled all their prejudices. *Among the chief rulers, many believed on him*. But even among them, so great is the influence of popular opinion, that they dissembled their faith, and contented themselves with only acknowledging Christ in their hearts; *for they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God*, John xii. 43.

* Psalm lxxvii. 16.

† Psalm lxxv. 7.

classed among the miracles of Jesus. What unspeakable dignity must have appeared in the person of our Lord, when his presence struck to the ground the band of men and officers which came to apprehend him ! What awful circumstances of a superior nature did his agony in the garden intimate * ! Above all, what unheard-of events

* Christ's agony in the garden so decidedly implies the superiority of our Lord's nature, and some peculiar purpose to be answered by his death, that I think it is capable of bearing much greater stress than is generally laid upon it. Can any man suppose that Christ, who had shewn such instances of patience through life, so much courage in the face of his enemies, and so little concern at his own sufferings and distresses, should now shrink back at the bare apprehension of death, if death was the only object of terror he had in view ? Surely, those Christians who speak of the death of Jesus as a martyr to his cause, and propose him under that view as an example to the world, seem to have forgotten that Christ by his agony in the garden, and his desire that the cup of sorrow might be removed from him, shewed much less fortitude than many martyrs to his cause have since shewn in their last moments. I cannot but conclude, therefore, that the horrors which surrounded our Lord in this trying season, were of a peculiar kind, and such as no mortal ever sustained. Christ declared it to be

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events were these which attended his death, when they wrought such an instantaneous conviction upon the most obdurate breasts? The prodigies which solemnized his last moments, darkness covering the whole land, the rending of the vail of the temple, the quaking of the earth, the opening of graves, even the bodies of men arising from their tombs, and appearing unto many; such convulsions of nature surely imply a superior dignity in his person, whose death they witnessed: and when viewed in connection with the magnificent scenes which followed his glorious resurrection and ascension, and the sending down the gifts of the Holy Ghost; these astonishing events altogether exalt our Lord above all comparison, and leave at an infinite distance, every

the hour of the power of darkness. And to what extent that power was permitted to be exercised upon his sacred person, who shall say? But what must have been the conflict which made it necessary for *an angel to be sent from heaven to strengthen him, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and the sweat of his body was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down on the ground!*

worker

worker of miracles, when mentioned with the Son of God.

And still further, as a discriminating mark in the miracles of Jesus, we find they were sometimes accompanied with the exertion of another proof of divine authority, namely, *the forgiveness of sins*. A power which our Lord's most inveterate enemies acknowledged, could only be the prerogative of God; but which Christ assumed, and exercised repeatedly.

He pardoned *the Sinner* which washed his feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee*. He forgave *the Woman* who was taken in adultery†. He cancelled the sins of the *penitent Thief* on the cross, in the moment of departure, and assured him of happiness‡. And the sins of the *Paralytic*, who was brought to him to be healed of his infirmity, he declared to be forgiven, and immediately wrought the cure on his body, as a confirmation of the mercy he had granted to his soul§. Are these the

* Luke vii. 43. *et seq.*

† John viii.

‡ Luke xxiii.

§ Mark ii.

deeds of a mere man? Was it ever known, or ever heard, that any prophet, any servant, or messenger from God, spake or acted in this manner? Would the meek and unassuming temper of Jesus have done this? Nay, would God himself have given a sanction to such usurpation? Surely that great and jealous Lord, who hath left upon everlasting record the most awful examples of his anger at the least incroachment upon his name or authority, would have checked the daring attempt, if Jesus had been no more than man, and thus made himself equal with God. He who caused the earth to open her mouth, and swallow up *Korah and his company*, for presuming only to enter upon the priestly office*; who made the hand of *Jeroboam* to wither for speaking rashly†, and struck *Uzzah* instantly dead for touching the ark‡, would never have suffered such repeated instances of blasphemy to have escaped unpunished; much less have justified, and

* Numb. xvi.

† 1 Kings xiii.

‡ 2 Sam. vi.

given the most decided approbation to the whole, by honouring our Lord's cause with the continual operation of miracles. Nothing can more fully demonstrate the divinity of our blessed Master : and the proof which Christ proposed to try it by, in the evidence of the cure he wrought on the cripple, was the clearest and most incontestible that could be desired. When, therefore, you find that the paralytic instantly arose at the command of Jesus, took up the bed whereon he lay, and went forth glorifying God, you will not hesitate to cry out with the Centurion, who received *his* conviction at the foot of the cross, *Doubtless this is the Son of God.*

But lastly, the highest, and finishing distinction of all, between Christ, and every other instructor of mankind, who performed miracles in confirmation of his commission, is the power which Jesus possessed, and actually employed, of conferring on his disciples the ability of producing similar effects to those which he himself had wrought, as so many proofs
that

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that they derived their authority from him.

Even in the lifetime of Christ, and before the Holy Ghost was imparted, this power was given to them. They were sent *to preach the Gospel, and to heal the sick; to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, and cast out devils* *. And when they returned with an account of the success of their embassy, they ascribed the whole to his personal name and authority. *Even the devils* - (they said) *are subject to us through thy name*. Upon which our blessed Lord made use of these remarkable expressions; *I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven; Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents, and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you* †. And after our Lord's ascension, and the descent of the divine Spirit, the commission was enlarged to a still further extent of power, according to the promise of Jesus, that *not only the works*

* Matth. x. 8.

† Luke x. 17—19.

which

which he himself had done should they do, but greater works than these *. But the same authority of the master was still preserved. *In my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover* †. Thus the whole was to be accomplished in the name, and by the power of Christ. Hence we find, upon every occasion, the Apostles working signs, and wonders, under this authority which they had received from their Master ; *in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk*, said Peter to the cripple, at the gate of the temple ‡. *Eneas, (saith the same Apostle,) Jesus Christ maketh thee whole* §. *Brother Saul, (says Ananias,) the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost* ||. *I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ of*

* John xiv. 12.

† Mark xvi. 18.

‡ Acts iii. 6.

§ Acts ix. 34.

|| Acts ix. 17.

Nazareth, to come out of her, said Paul to the Damsel possessed with a spirit of divination. From all which instances it is evident the Apostles considered the ability they possessed to be derived immediately from him in whose name, and by whose authority they acted. And his name, through faith in his name†, was the universal charm by which all their miracles were wrought.*

Indeed, Peter for himself, and his brethren, solemnly declared, that the wonderful deeds which were performed by them were wholly to be ascribed to the power of Christ. *Why look ye, (says he to the people, who were struck with admiration at the cure of the cripple in Solomon's porch,) why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness, we had made this man to walk ‡? Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead,*

* Acts xvi. 18.

† Acts iii. 16.

‡ Acts iii. 12.

*even by him, doth this man stand here before you whole *.*

Now, then, review the whole of the argument in favour of our Lord's divinity, as it arises from the miracles of Christ, and those of his Apostles wrought in his name. Examine, with the most rigid strictness, the many instances of a supernatural power with which Jesus performed his mighty works, totally different from every servant of God, both in the *manner* by which they were accomplished, and in the *nature* of the miracles themselves. Consider, also, the additional testimony in the ability Jesus imparted to his disciples of doing the same wonderful deeds as he himself had wrought. And to the whole subjoin the peculiar evidence of the supreme power and authority Christ exercised *in the forgiveness* of sins, with which his miracles were not unfrequently accompanied, (and which is, without all doubt, the highest and most finished proof of divinity,) and then question whether it be possible to believe that any

* Acts iv. 10.

being, merely human, could possess such properties ! Surely, if we will but view things coolly and dispassionately, there arises from hence such a strength of testimony, to prove the divinity of Jesus, as ought to carry conviction to every candid mind.

But the miracles of Jesus, and those wrought in his name by his servants the Apostles, though they afford such incontestible evidences of his divinity, yet are they by no means the only proofs we meet with in the life of Christ of this important doctrine. The blessed Redeemer manifested others equally great and convincing. The *language* he assumed, and the *authoritative manner* in which he discoursed with his disciples, upon many occasions; these are another species of testimony which clearly define his nature to have been more than human. And when we discover, also, in his life, that he possessed *divine attributes*, and is distinguished by the sacred writers under *divine titles*, which are the well-known incommunicable distinctions of the Godhead : When we behold

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these

these properties all uniting in the formation of his character, they cannot leave the mind in a moment's suspense whether he be not God, *in whom* (as the Apostle expresses it) *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* *.

But the consideration of these, and other particulars yet remaining to be noticed in our Lord's character, would necessarily lead me beyond the usual limits. And it will be proper at present to relieve your attention. I desire, therefore, to leave you to the full impression of what hath been already said, with an humble supplication to the throne of grace, that the light of God's Holy Spirit may precede our steps in the paths of truth, and lead us to the full discovery of that knowledge which may make us wise unto salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

* Coloss. ii. 3.

S E R M O N VI.

JOHN vii. 46.

Never man spake like this man.

IN tracing the accomplishment of prophecy concerning the Messiah, in the person of Jesus Christ, the preceding discourse was principally intended to point out the proofs of our blessed Lord's possessing that mysterious unity of nature which was predicted should constitute the Messiah's character. The evidences brought before you to substantiate the claim of Jesus to this distinguishing peculiarity, in demonstrating that his birth was altogether miraculous, were, I hope, convincing, and unanswerable. And the subsequent events in our Lord's history (as far as we have yet proceeded in the subject)

tended no less to prove that his nature was more than human. The testimony derived from the peculiar *manner* and *authority* by which Christ wrought his miracles, and imparted ability to his disciples in *his name* to perform theirs, carries with it (as I then observed to you) a species of evidence in support of his divinity, which, I am of opinion, will appear more satisfactory the more it is attended to.

It was impossible in that discourse to comprize the whole of the arguments to this doctrine as they arise from the incidents in the life of Christ. I have now, therefore, re-assumed the topic, in order to finish what was then unavoidably postponed, and to examine with the same fairness and impartiality, the other testimonies in this subject, which appear in our Lord's character.

The first to which I shall beg your attention is, that which is suggested in the words of the text; I mean the *unparalleled discourses* of Christ: for these certainly very highly express a peculiar dignity in his person.

Among

Among the ancient Prophets we can clearly discern the credentials of the commission by which they acted. The system of morality delivered by Moses was evidently a divine system; and as far as it extended, differed in nothing from that of Jesus Christ. But it is not in the moral parts of the Gospel only that we are to look for traces of our Lord's greatness of character, but in the whole scope and tendency of his religion taken altogether. The preceptive doctrines of Christianity are perhaps the least from whence we derive evidences of the divinity of its blessed Author. Much higher proofs abound from the peculiar and distinguishing points of his religion. His solemn assurances that the great purport of his embassy was to expiate the sins of our nature; the language he assumed when expressing this awful truth; the personal authority by which he proclaimed pardon to the penitent and faithful in this world, and happiness in that which is to come; the divine wisdom by which he uttered these, and the like doctrines, and the divine power by which he

declared he would accomplish the whole of his designs, by *drawing all men unto him**. These are among the unequalled subjects of our Lord's discourses which fully prove that *he spake as never man spake*.

It will not be required of me that I should select from the Gospel any particular passages to establish the truth of this observation. The fact itself will more fully appear by a reference to the New Testament. Let me beg of you to examine the words of Jesus by the severest test of criticism, and see whether it be possible to account either for the *sum* and *substance* of what he taught, or the *manner* in which he delivered his doctrines to the world, upon any other supposition than of his being more than man. I conceive the strongest evidence will result from this review of our Lord's discourses in favour of his divinity, and it is such as will admit of the greatest stress being laid upon it.

All the former teachers of mankind in the will of God, delivered their message with a

* John xii. 32.

solemn declaration in whose name they came. *Thus saith the Lord*; but Jesus gives his precepts in a tone of personal authority; *Behold, I say unto you*, is the usual form with which Christ prefaced his commandments. And his invitation to sinners to embrace his gracious terms of salvation runs in the same style as from himself. Come unto *me* (is the language made use of when calling men to his gospel) *all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**. *If any come unto me, I will in no wise cast him out*†. Who among the Prophets ever opened their commission in terms like these? Well might the people be astonished (as it is said they were) at his doctrine, for this was teaching, no doubt, as *one that had authority, and not as the Scribes*‡.

But though this manner of speaking is so peculiar to our Lord, and very strongly marks the dignity of his person, yet these

* Matth. xi. 28.

† John vi. 37.

‡ Matth. vii. 29.

are but the slightest, and most inconsiderable instances of *the wisdom and spirit by which he spake*. When Christ dwells upon the great and interesting doctrines of his Gospel, his language rises to a much higher degree of sublimity; *and all bare him witness* (the Evangelist informs us,) *and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth* *. What numberless proofs of this unequalled dignity do we find in every page of the Gospel! *In this place is one greater than the temple* †. *The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day* ‡. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven, If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread which I shall give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world* §. *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me (as the Scripture saith,) out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water* ||. When we trace through the whole tenor

* Luke iv. 22. † Matt. xii. 6. ‡ Ibid viii. 1.

§ John vi. 51. || John vii. 37, 38.

of our Lord's discourses a vein of language like this, and attested by a train of events equally great and mysterious ; when we hear him, also, declaring himself to be the *resurrection* and *the life*, and that he possesses the supreme power of *raising the dead*, and finally determining *the fate of all the race of men* ; that *the hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth* * ; and that the rewards of fidelity, and the punishments to disobedience, will wholly result from *his* determination : surely there is something in all this which defines the character of the Son of God most perfectly, and draws an everlasting line of separation between the person of Jesus, and the highest of the sons of men. In short, let us only suppose a Divine Being was to descend from heaven, and to live and converse with mankind, as Christ did, what greater evidences could we desire, in proof of the greatness of his nature, than our Lord gave in the spirit and wisdom, by

* John v. 28.

which

which he daily spake? And whoever reads the discourses of our Lord as they are found in the Gospel, fairly and candidly, and with an unprejudiced mind, will be frequently induced during the perusal, to make the same observation which the Jewish officers did in the text, *Never man spake like this man**.

The next argument in proof of our blessed Lord's divinity arising from the circumstances of his life, may be taken from the divine *attributes* which he possessed. And as these are clearly among the peculiar cha-

* If men would take their ideas of this divine Teacher (says the great Dr. Hurd) immediately from his own doctrines, and not as they are misrepresented, or, at best but imperfectly represented, by the glosses of others, they would come of themselves to this important conclusion. If they would make the gospel their serious study, and not their *casual* amusement, they would want no monitor to let them into the merits or use of it. They would more than see, they would feel the spirit with which Jesus spake, and they would readily offer to him not their barren applause, but their sincere obedience." See an excellent Sermon on this subject, Vol. III. Sermon IV.

racters

acters of Deity, the only object I shall have to accomplish will be to prove the certainty of the thing itself, that these properties were in the person of Jesus. Some of them, indeed, are so evident, that we can plainly discover them ourselves, in the words and actions of Christ; and others are so fully ascribed to him by the Apostles, and inspired writers, that there can be no hesitation in concluding that he possessed them. A few quotations from Scripture will be sufficient to our purpose.

Omnipresence is so peculiar an attribute of Deity, that our Lord's possessing this perfection would of itself be sufficient to determine the certainty of his divine nature; for what less than an infinite Being can fill infinite space? We shall require nothing more to substantiate the fact of our Lord's ubiquity than his own declarations. During the course of his ministry he had assured his disciples, that *where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them* *. And if any man love

* Matthew xviii. 20.

me (says Christ,) my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him *. And agreeable to this, in his last interview with the Apostles, when he gave them his final commission to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, he confirmed this assurance of his perpetual presence: *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* †. Such proofs of the omnipresence of the Lord, and founded on his own solemn declarations, shew in what sense it is we are authorized to infer the divinity of Jesus, from his possession of this peculiar and distinguishing attribute of the Godhead.

Omnipresence necessarily includes another of the incommunicable perfections, namely, *Omniscience*. The continual presence of a being uncircumscribed by space, and unlimited in operation, naturally implies his continual observation. And Jesus had given so many proofs of his possessing this faculty during his abode upon earth, that

* John xiv. 23.

† Matt. xxviii. 20.

his disciples universally ascribed it to him upon all occasions. Our Lord perceived the *woman in the throng* who had touched him*. He knew that *Lazarus* was dead before he proceeded to Bethany†. He knew the *poor man at the pool of Bethesda* had been a long time labouring under his infirmity‡. He penetrated the hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees, and beheld the scheme that was forming against him, and by his words intimidated them from putting it, at that time, into execution§. By a look only upon *Peter* he convinced him that he knew of his denial, and by a word to his *disciples*, he intimated that he was no stranger to their intentions. In short, it would be tedious to enumerate all the instances we meet with in the Evangelists, in proof of our Lord's omniscience. It was the exercise of this perfection which wrought conviction in the heart of *Nathaniel*, that Jesus was the Messiah, and drew from him,

* Matth. ix. 20.

† John v. 6.

‡ John xi. 14.

§ Luke xx. 26.

in consequence of it, that ever memorable confession, that Christ was the Son of God, and King of Israel*. It was the same which made the Apostle *Peter* cry out, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee* †. And hence we hear the frequent observation in our Lord's history, that *Jesus knew their thoughts*. *He knew that they were desirous to ask him*, and accordingly reasoned with them upon the subject, just as if they had communicated their sentiments. *He knew all men*, (says St. John) *and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man* ‡. *Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at him* §. *He knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him* ||. Nothing can more fully prove a divine being possessing divine powers than such facts as these! Christ therefore gave this unequivocal testimony of himself during his abode upon

* John i. 49.

† John xxi. 17.

‡ John ii. 25.

§ John vi. 61.

|| John xiii. 11.

earth,

earth, and the full display of this great attribute is reserved for that day when *the Lord will come to judgment, to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and to make manifest the counsels of the heart* *.

The

* 1 Cor. iv. 5. To avoid prolixity, I have not noticed in the body of the discourse, (what must ever be considered a very strong additional evidence of our Lord's divinity,) the prescience he manifested concerning future events. Some of them were of that nature, that, to all human apprehension, they were not only wonderful, but highly improbable. Not to dwell upon many incidents relating to himself which he foretold, I consider the destruction of Jerusalem, which our blessed Lord so exactly described, as one of the highest, and most incontestible proofs of his possessing this divine attribute in its full extent. The destruction both of the city, and the temple, the signs and wonders which should precede these events; the calamities which should ensue; the dispersion of the Jewish people; nay, the very ensigns of the nation, by whom the destruction was to be effected; all are related with a precision surpassing credibility, in a mind merely human, and can only be resolved into the infinite knowledge of him to whose observation the past, present, and future are but as the same object. One part of this memorable prophecy of our Lord remains yet to be fulfilled. And the same prescience which predicted the dispersion of Israel, could not err in the assurance that they

The *eternity* of the Son of God may, in a great measure, be inferred from what hath been already shewn *. Both from his own declarations, and the character in which the sacred writers have considered him, as the *Creator*, and *Preserver* of the universe, we have full authority to conclude that *his goings forth were, as the Prophet declared of him, from everlasting.* For he *which had glory with the Father before the world, and without whom was not any thing made that was made,* must have been himself *without beginning of days, or end of life.* But to put the matter beyond all dispute, our blessed Lord confirmed the whole when he appeared to his beloved Apostle, in that glorious vision mentioned

they should again be gathered in. A day will come when *the Deliverer will arise from Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob,* Rom. xi. 26. Whoever wishes to see the prophecy of Christ concerning this event of the destruction of Jerusalem more fully illustrated, may consult their historian Josephus, or Dr. Whitby's General Preface to his Gospels.

See Sermon II.

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in the Book of the Revelations, and called himself by these express titles, which can only be applied to an Eternal Being, *I am Alpha, and Omega, the First and the last* *.

Immutability is another peculiar and distinguishing attribute of Deity; and if the testimony of an Apostle is valid, we cannot forbear ascribing it to the person of Christ. *Jesus Christ* (says he,) *the same yesterday, to-day and for ever* †. Terms which need no explanation. The same Apostle, in ano-

* Revelations i. 8. 11. It is a striking observation of the learned Dr. Doddridge (in his Family Expositor, vol. vi. page 431 and 434.) concerning the equivalent phrases applied both to the Supreme Father, and the Son in this book, that it is not easy to prove, that the 8th verse belongs only to the Supreme Father, but that the same titles should be repeated so soon after as the 11th verse, and in a connection which demonstrates that they are given to Christ, is very remarkable. And I cannot forbear recording it (says the Doctor,) that this text hath done more than any other in the Bible, towards preventing me from giving into that scheme which would make our Lord Jesus Christ no more than a deified creature.

† Hebrews xiii. 8.

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ther place, speaking of the eternal, and unchangeable nature of Christ, draws a striking contrast between him and his works. *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou remainest, and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail* *. These are strong expressions of the immutability of the divine nature, and there can be no doubt to whom the whole refers, if we consult the original.

Omnipotence is another peculiar character of the Deity. And nothing can be more clearly applied to Christ. All the works of *Creation, Providence, Grace, and Judgment*, are declared to be his. As *all things* are said to be made by him, so by him do all things consist. He upholdeth all things by the word of his power. He is able to subdue all things to himself. He it is who is full of grace and

* Hebrews i. 10. et seq.

truth, out of whose fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. The resurrection and the life, at whose voice all that are in their graves will come forth, and by whose power all will be risen to judgment at the last day, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. His mighty angels! how fully descriptive of sovereignty and power! And who can behold such an assemblage of qualities uniting in the person of our blessed Master, and constituting every idea we can form of omnipotence, and still question his claim to divinity?

Holiness is so distinguishing an attribute of the Godhead, that perhaps it is this more eminently than any other which draws the line of separation between the divine and human nature. And this is also ascribed to Jesus. He is not only called *Holy*, but by way of emphasis the *Holy One* *. And the Prophet Daniel, in describing the future events of the Messiah's kingdom, makes use of the same appellation, the *Most Holy* †.

* Acts xiii. 35.

† Dan. ix. 24.

In the Apocalypse, our blessed Lord is revealed under the same exalted character. *These things saith he that is holy, he that is true* *; as if this phrase was applicable only to him.

From the *attributes* let us pass on to the examination of the *names* by which Jesus Christ is no less distinguished in Scripture, and we shall find the same invariable testimony arising from hence of his divinity. In short, both *titles* and *attributes*, and all the peculiar and distinguishing properties and perfections of the Godhead, which are in one part or other fully ascribed to the person of our Lord, all concur to justify his own assertion when he said, *All things that the Father hath are mine* †.

Some of the *names* and *titles* by which Christ is known in Scripture, have been incidentally noticed in what hath been already offered. It will be the less necessary, therefore, to be particular. I shall produce a few instances sufficient to answer my present purpose.

* Rev. iii. 7.

† John xvi. 15.

It is well known that the highest and most eminent distinction by which the Supreme Father is revealed in his holy word, is the incommunicable name of the Great Jehovah. This, indeed, is so peculiarly his own, that it can be applicable to none but the self-existing, and independant God. Now this very term we frequently find made use of when speaking of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the most part, the word *Jehovah* of the Old Testament is the same as *Lord* in the New. And had the original been preserved this would have been more manifest. In the Old Testament, the great Jehovah is said to be the only Saviour over all the earth. *Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else; I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour* *. In the New Testament, the same character is preserved, and the correspondence shewn. St. Peter explains this very passage of the Prophet, and applies it to our

* Isaiah xlv. 22. 43. 11.

bleſſed Lord, when he ſays, *Neither is there ſalvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we muſt be ſaved* *.

The Prophet Jeremiah clearly defined the perſon of our Lord, when he proclaimed the Meſſiah under that diſtinguiſhing name, *Jehovah our righteousneſs*. For Chriſt alone is *our righteousneſs*, according to the Apoſtle, and *wiſdom, and ſanctification, and redemption* †. And the Prophet Zechariah, when ſpeaking in the character of Jehovah, ſays, *They ſhall look on him whom they have pierced*, could mean no other than *him* whom the Apoſtle John declared was pierced by the ſoldier on the croſs, that this ſcripture might be fulfilled ‡.

You will not expect me to enumerate all the paſſages with which the word of God abounds, in proof that the incommunicable name of the Great Jehovah is frequently made uſe of when ſpeaking of the perſon of our Lord. This would be unneceſſary.

* Acts iv. 12.

† 1 Corinthians i. 30.

‡ Compare Zech. xii. 10. with John xix. 37.

I shall dismiss the consideration of it, therefore, with only observing, that when we behold this sacred distinction of the self-existent and uncreated Being, thus repeatedly, and without hesitation applied to Christ, nothing can more clearly imply his divinity. *For he whose name is Jehovah, (as the Psalmist justly observes,) can only be the Most Highest over all the earth*.* And when to this we add how exceedingly scrupulous the Jews were of using this hallowed name, lest they should incur the penalty threatened to the taking it in vain, it cannot be supposed the Apostles, who were all of them Jews, and bred up in Jewish notions, would have been forward in ascribing it to our Lord, but upon the most perfect conviction of its being right. And, therefore, we may very safely adopt the words of the Apostle Peter, *Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus which was crucified, both Lord and Christ†.*

* Psalm lxxxiii. 18.

† Acts ii. 16.

Another term of distinction by which our blessed Lord is frequently mentioned in Scripture, is that of *God*. The Prophet, when declaring the advent of the Messiah, said his name should be called *the Mighty God* *. And the Apostles of Christ have confirmed it. St. Paul calls Jesus the *Great God* †: *God our Saviour* ‡; and *God over all, blessed for ever* §. And, speaking of his church, he declares it to be the church of the *Living God* ||. St. John, to the same amount, styles Christ the *true God*: *This is the true God, and eternal life* ¶; alluding, perhaps, to our Lord's account of himself, when he says, *I am the resurrection and the life*. And St. Jude, in his Epistle, terms him *the only wise God our Saviour*, and ascribes to him all divine honours. *To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion, and power, now and for ever* **. All which very strongly express

* Isaiah ix. 6.

† Titus i. 3.

|| 1 Timothy iii. 15.

** Jude 25.

‡ Titus ii. 13.

§ Romans ix. 5.

¶ 1 John v. 20.

the divinity of him to whom they are applied, and are such characters as cannot possibly be ascribed to any inferior being.

Nor are these all. Christ is yet further known in his holy word, under other titles of a like exalted nature. He is said to be *the Lord of glory*, and *which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory* *. He is declared to be also *Lord of all* †. And St. Peter, in his sermon to Cornelius, and his company, called him by this name. But more particularly, the beloved Apostle hath left on record such testimonies of his blessed Master, in those revelations with which he was favoured, as leave no room to question the divinity of his person. More than once he heard a voice proclaim him under that almighty character, *King of kings, and Lord of lords* ‡. Than which nothing can more fully shew his power and greatness. And it is remarkable that in the same chapter in which it is

* 1 Cor. ii. 8.

† Acts x. 36.

‡ Rev. xvii. 14. 19. 26.

said,

said, that *Jesus sent his angel to testify these things in the churches*, it is also said, that it was *the Lord God of the Prophets that sent his angel*: a plain proof that *Jesus is the Lord God of the Prophets* *.

And to sum up all, our blessed Lord closes the sacred canon of Scripture with the testimony of himself, *I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last; I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and death* †. This solemn declaration was made to the Apostle by one whom he saw like *the son of man*, the well-known character of our blessed Lord. Indeed, had the person not been specified, the words themselves would have clearly ascertained to whom they belonged. None but Christ could have said, *I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore*. And to leave the full impression of those glorious truths on the minds of the faithful, he repeats the same assurances of his eternity in

* Rev. xxii. 6.

† Rev. xxii. 13.

the conclusion of the visions, *I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last*. All which are parallel to the declarations God is pleased to make of himself, by his servant the Prophet; *I am the First and the Last, and beside me there is no God* *.

Now, then, consider the united evidence arising from the *attributes* and *names* by which Christ is every where distinguished in the holy Scripture. We find the same, or equivalent phrases applied both to the Father and the Son, and from this equal participation of all the perfections of the Godhead what can we possibly infer less than the divinity of Jesus? Is not this what Christ means when he says to his Father, *All mine are thine, and thine are mine* †?

Besides, is it possible for any man to believe the sacred writers would all have concurred in speaking of the person of Jesus under such eternal distinctions by which

* Isaiah xlv. 6.

† John xvii. 10.

alone the great Sovereign of the universe is known to his creatures, unless they had received the most perfect conviction of it? For it should be observed, that those attributes and titles of Jehovah are not ascribed to our Lord in one or two passages only, and of a doubtful nature, but in numberless instances, and of the clearest and most obvious meaning, and scattered over every part of the apostolic writings. Supposing, then, it were possible to be mistaken in the application of any single part of our evidence, yet this ought not, it *cannot*, indeed, affect the whole. The clear proof of our Lord's possession of any *one* of the eternal perfections ascribed to him, must determine at once the certainty of his divinity. And to imagine that such a body of evidence should arise in Scripture testifying as to a matter of fact what was yet questionable, would be childish in the extreme. It would be to suppose the sacred writers were either ignorant themselves of the real character of Jesus, or what is, if possible, yet

yet less to be believed, were perfectly indifferent what consequences might follow their testimony. Nay, more than this, that God himself should suffer a spirit of delusion and error to make its way into the church, instantly on its establishment, and continue its baleful influence through so many ages from the days of the Apostles to the present hour; which is at once the most senseless, not to say impious idea that can be conceived. And yet the conclusion seems inevitable on the presumption that our Lord is not truly divine. In short, the evidences are so numerous, and diversified in support of this great article of our faith, that the want of belief is not to be accounted for on common principles, and one should be almost tempted to apprehend that there must be some latent cause in the mind itself preventing their effect. The pride of reason joined, perhaps, to what the Apostle emphatically calls *the god of this world, blind the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ,*

Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them *.

But what raises the character of Jesus to the highest point of sublimity is, that important purpose which is declared by the sacred writers to be the great end and design of his mission; I mean, *the taking away sin by the sacrifice of himself* †. This implies a superiority in his nature distinct from all former prophets, or teachers of mankind, and which, from very evident causes, could never be accomplished by any being merely human. And hence the Prophet, which proclaimed our Lord's approach, and became the herald of his appearance, pointed to Jesus under this remarkable character, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world* ‡.

It would be departing, in some measure, from the more immediate object of my discourse, to go over all the evidences we have in Scripture, respecting the great doctrine of atonement; and yet I cannot content my-

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

† Heb. ix. 26.

‡ John i. 36.
self

self without observing, that it is this, of all others, which peculiarly distinguishes the Christian faith.

Independantly of all the authority we derive from holy writ, it is a fact which remains not now to be disputed, that forgiveness of sins has been the great object mankind in all ages have stood in need of, and sought after with the most anxious solicitude, to calm the fears of an awakened conscience, when smitten with the sense of guilt. The heathen world, long before the coming of Christ, had the most lively apprehensions of what sad consequences *might* follow the sins of life, and studied by every means in their power to prevent them. Hence they had recourse to every offering superstition could invent, to propitiate the offended Deity. The religion of the Jews partook much of the same nature. By expiatory sacrifices they were led to hope some compensation was made for the breach of moral duties. And as these were of divine appointment, though the human mind could trace no affinity between the slaughter of a beast,

beast, and the sin of a man, yet it seemed to sooth the conscience with the hope of pardon.

Now, whether it will be admitted or not, what the Apostle to the Hebrews hath asserted, that *these were shadows of good things to come*, of which the *substance was Christ* *; yet one thing is certain, this universal consent to expiatory sacrifices plainly shews the great anxiety of the world on this important point, and it is but a fair conclusion, that if God was pleased, in compassion to his sinful creatures, to make a further revelation of his will, after the many ineffectual attempts which had been made by his servants the Prophets, to bring mankind from ways of sin to paths of virtue, and that another more powerful messenger should come on this grand embassy, he would at least satisfy the mind of man concerning the means of propitiation, and shew wherein the efficacy of the offerings appointed under the law did consist. For to

* Hebrews x. 1. 9.

suppose otherwise, by leaving mankind in the dark on this interesting topic, would be to suppose the Gospel still defective in that part particularly which most materially concerned the wants of our nature.

But if Christ came to teach a system of moral virtue only, and no more, alas! this had been done before; Moses had done it. Many prophets and righteous men had done it. But to what effect? It was not mere precept and example that could restore human nature to its original purity. Neither was it the calling upon sinners to return to the Lord that gave them the power of returning. This would have been like bidding a man who was chained down to the earth with bars of the hardest iron, to burst asunder the bands of his own accord, and rise up and walk. Supposing, therefore, that Christ came only to answer this purpose, wherein did his commission differ, or in what point was it superior to that of Moses? And could it be an object worthy a messenger from heaven to deliver a law of righteousness which

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had

had been so ineffectually delivered more than a thousand years before, and to preach the same doctrines which had been so repeatedly preached in vain? Is it possible that any man can seriously think that God would deal thus with his poor, fallen, and helpless creatures? Let reason answer the question, (for to this great arbiter I appeal for the decision,) whether this would have been either to the honour of God, or the advantage of man?

When you have duly pondered the force of this argument in favour of the great doctrine of atonement, go on and review the evidences for the fact itself.

The prophets had predicted, that *the Messiah should be cut off, but not for himself*: that *he should make his soul an offering for sin*; that *by his righteousness he should justify many, and bear their iniquities*. In conformity to this, when our blessed Lord came into the world, he declared himself to be this very sacrifice, and that the end of his mission was for this express purpose, *I am the*

the good Shepherd, the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep *. And in his discourses he frequently made mention of his death, sometimes in a figurative way, and at other times more open, but always as an event of the utmost importance to mankind, and as the great end of his ministry. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified; verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit* †. And as the time approached nearer, Christ expressed himself more openly concerning this great event. *Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I*

* Compare John x. 11. with Isaiah liii. and Daniel ix. 26.

† John xii. 24.

unto this hour *. And when discoursing with his disciples at one time upon the interesting subject of his mission, he in plain terms declared to them, that his death was purposely appointed as a sacrifice for sin. *The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many* †. To give his life a ransom for many ! what could this imply, but that he was to be an expiatory offering ? When do we find any moralist, any of the old prophets or messengers from God, talk in a language like this ? Surely, these expressions must evidently prove that some higher purpose than merely instructing mankind was included in the ministry of Jesus, and that his death was more particularly to be considered, also, in the nature of an oblation, and atonement for sin !

Nor is this all the evidence that Christ gave respecting this doctrine. The institution of that solemn supper which he appointed as a standing ordinance in his

* John xii. 27.

† Matthew xx. 28.

church, implied the importance of the object it was intended to perpetuate. The bread which was to be broken, and the cup to be poured forth, were altogether emblems void of meaning, if the death of Jesus be considered in the light of a martyr only to his cause. But viewed as the memorial of an oblation for sin, they then become apt and significant representations of *his body*, which was *broken*, and *his blood* which was *shed*, for *the sins of the world*. And hence the Apostle justly reasons, *the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ*?* The communion of the body and blood of Christ is a strong expression, and clearly intends something more than the mere commemoration of his death. To have a full idea of it let us only suppose it had been said of any of the Apostles, that in a service of this kind it was called the communion of their

* 1 Cor. x. 16.

body and blood ! and the impiety of the application will be immediately glaring.

But it is not only on the authority of Christ himself, great and unquestionable as that authority ought to be, that we ground the certainty of this doctrine. The Apostles, also, after their being endued with the influence of the divine Spirit, in all their discourses inculcate the same thing. The writings of those inspired men abound with phrases of the plainest kind in proof of it. One assures us, that *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures* *; that *we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins* †; that *he made our peace through the blood of his cross* ‡; and that *he gave himself a ransom for all* §. Another declares, that *Christ bare our sins in his own body on the tree* ||; that *we are not redeemed with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot* ¶. A third proclaims, that it

* 1 Cor. xv. 3.

† Ephes. i. 7.

‡ Coloss. i. 20.

§ 1 Tim. ii. 6.

|| 1 Pet. ii. 24

¶ 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

is the blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin *; and that he is the propitiation for our sins, †. And all concur in asserting, that the great end of our Lord's coming was to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Are all these mere words without meaning? If so, how comes it to pass that such things should be said of Jesus only, and not of any former messenger of God? Do we discover any expressions of a similar tendency in any of the writings of the Prophets? Was it ever said of Moses, or Elijah, or any other holy servants of God, that *they* took away sin by the sacrifice of themselves?

And, as if all these were not sufficient to confirm the certainty of the doctrine, it is further remarkable, that when the Apostle John, in a vision, saw heaven opened, and heard the acclamations of the happy multitude; this, he tells us, was the universal chorus of praise and thanksgiving; which he heard, *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood* ‡. All which, if language can

* 1 John i. 7. † 1 John ii. 2. ‡ Rev. v. 9.

be depended upon, decidedly prove, that the first and leading principle of the Gospel is the atoning blood of its blessed Author. And it is not without the strongest evidences we conclude, that Christ is to us both *a sacrifice for sin*, as well as *an ensample of godly life*. But I pursue this reasoning no further. Suffer me only to assume the *possibility* of the fact itself, that *we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ* * : and the superiority of his nature must immediately be admitted. For to give efficacy to that oblation, it became expedient that *he* should be *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners* †, and in every way untainted with the pollution of that fallen race whose guilt he suffered to expiate. And hence, therefore, must be inferred the divinity of his person.

The evidences in proof of this important doctrine, which arise from the last scenes of our Lord's history, though carrying with them a peculiar energy, are of a nature

* Heb. x. 10.

† Heb. vii. 26.

much easier to be conceived than expressed. In the plain and unaffected narrative of the Evangelists, it is impossible not to feel their impresson. The awful signs which they relate as accompanying the death of Jesus, and the glorious manifestation which attended his resurrection and ascension, altogether proclaim a dignity in the person of our Lord infinitely transcending all ideas of a being merely human ; especially when it is considered that Christ had foretold every remarkable circumstance which distinguished those events. He had declared, indeed, not only that his death was voluntary, but that his resurrection should be the result of his own immediate power. *No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again **. For as the Father bath life in himself, so bath he given the Son to have life in himself. And as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will †.

* John x. 18.

† John v. 20, 21.

And

And hence it was that Christ said unto the Jews, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* But he spake (the Evangelist tells us,) *of the temple of his body.* When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them *.

But on these topics I forbear to enlarge. They possess an energy in the words of the Evangelists perfectly inimitable, and which cannot but suffer under a representation from all other pens.

One evidence, however, of Christ's divinity, resulting from the view of the conclusive scenes of our Lord's life, is so very pointed, that I venture to propose it to your more particular consideration ; namely, the unequalled dignity which they have given to our Lord's person and manner, during his last interview with his Apostles, and the authority with which he delivered to them his final commission.

He had shewed himself alive to them after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen

* John ii. 19. et seq.

of them for forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*; and having opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and shewed them the expediency on which it was founded, that thus it was written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day†: he now proceeded to deliver to them that commission which involved in it all the great events of his church. All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world‡. And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover§. And he led them

* Acts i. 3.

† Luke xxxiv. 45, 46.

‡ Matt. xxviii. 18. et seq.

§ Mark xvi. 17, 18.

*out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem, with great joy *. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen †.* What grandeur and magnificence are there in these words! What a concurrence of circumstances to illustrate and prove the divinity of our blessed Lord! With an authority unequalled he dismisses his humble followers to the arduous enterprize of the conversion of a world, assuring them at the same time of his continual presence! And in the proof of the high commission under which they acted, they were to carry the fullest evidences with them of his divine power. In *his* name they were to cast out devils, and perform all their mighty works. And accordingly, when they went forth upon their

* Luke xxiv. 50.

† Mark xvi. 20.

employment, it is said, the *Lord* was *working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*. Are not these very high demonstrations of the divinity of Jesus? Did ever any character among the sons of men assume a language like this? Or had ever any his pretensions justified by the correspondence of events so singular? I ask not what prophet or messenger of God acted in this manner, but I demand what angel from heaven ever claimed such distinctions, or mentioned his own name as the efficient cause of his ministry!

But this is not all. The Apostles before they proceeded to preach the Gospel, were to receive supernatural assistance to qualify them for the work in the descent of the Holy Ghost; and even this, Jesus declared, should be his own immediate gift. *When the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me*. He shall not speak of himself,*

* John xv. 26.

but

but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak, and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine, therefore said I that he shall take of mine, and shew it unto you *. Is it possible to hear these things, and still question the divinity of him by whom such declarations are made? That Christ should say of the blessed Spirit *which searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God* †, and whom to speak a word against is pronounced to be an unpardonable sin ‡; that when the Comforter is come whom I will send, he shall not speak of himself, but he shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you; can we conceive it possible that any being, less than the divine Being should talk thus freely of the Holy Spirit? And that the Holy Spirit should actually descend upon the minds of the Apostles in perfect conformity to those declarations of Jesus?

* John xiv. 13. *et seq.*

† 1 Cor. ii. 10.

‡ Matthew xii. 32.

Nay,

Nay, more. The form of baptism which our Lord appointed for the introduction of converts into the Gospel-covenant, and which is become the grand charter of the church, is yet, if possible, more difficult to be accounted for upon the supposition that his divinity is denied. When Christ sent his disciples into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature, the command was, *baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* *. In which form Christ classes himself in priority of rank before the Eternal Spirit, and separates, as it were, between the Father and the Holy Ghost. Was this without design, and without meaning? Had our Lord no object in view in doing it? I should suppose this impossible. And what then are we to conclude, that any created being however high or exalted, would be so presumptuous as to place himself on a level with the Supreme Father, and the divine Spirit! What could be more blasphemous, or de-

* Matthew xxviii. 19.

rogatory from the honour of God ! Surely the advocates for the simple humanity of Jesus, must, upon their own principles, suppose that our blessed Lord far exceeded his commission by thus encroaching upon the divine prerogatives ; for it is impossible to assign any reason for Christ's assuming this equality, unless it was his right. And, for my own part, I cannot but observe, that this form of baptism, (which is evidently the solemn dedication of Christians to God, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,) would of itself be more than half conviction with me of the divinity of our blessed Master, even if unsupported by the other direct testimonies of holy Scripture.

One point more remains yet to be considered by which the dignity of the great Author of the Christian faith is clearly ascertained, namely, the supreme character in which he is to appear as the Judge of the world.

The Scriptures have so fully and plainly revealed the doctrine of a future judgment, and a day of account, that it forms a part of every

every man's creed, and is the common object of universal expectation. That our blessed Saviour is to preside at this awful tribunal, is an opinion also, in which all Christians are agreed, though the divinity of his person is by some rejected. But certainly the exercise of supreme authority but ill corresponds with the notion of a subordinate being. The very description which the sacred writers have given of this *great day of the Lord*, is enough to impress the mind with the fullest conviction that there must be somewhat divine in his person and character, who possesses a sovereignty so awfully powerful. When we read, that *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God* * ; that *he cometh with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment upon all* †, and that *the very heavens and earth will flee away from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne* ‡. Are these things credible upon the supposi-

* 2 Theff. i. 7. † Jude xv. ‡ Rev. xx. 11.

tion, that Christ is no more, after all, than an human being? Is the belief of it consistent with principles of common sense!

Again. Our blessed Lord, in his predictions of this day, declared, that *all who are in their graves should hear His voice and come forth*; but is it to be the voice of a glorified man which is to effect this? to rouse the dead, to re-animate the lifeless mass of dust and ashes, and to abolish for ever the empire of death and the grave? Can this be really possible? But what is still more astonishing, (but which the unbelievers of our Lord's divinity must receive with unreserved conviction,) is the opinion, that this man Christ Jesus, in consequence of his exaltation, possesses such an intimate knowledge of the human heart, with the infinite circumstances and transactions of life, as to be able to determine the exact measures of duty, or disobedience in every man's conduct, with all the allowances to be made to particular situations, constitutional infirmities, and the like; and can draw the line of strict justice with the nicest hand,

hand, so as to ascertain the rewards or punishments due to every individual of the innumerable race of men. Can any one, seriously and coolly adopt this opinion?

Let us for a moment, however, pass the boundaries of probability, and in opposition to the numberless obstructions in the way, let it be admitted. Now, then, we reduce in idea the great Judge of all the earth to the humble standard of humanity. But even here, again, a new difficulty arises. To what cause can we reasonably ascribe this wonderful exaltation? What was there in the life of Jesus, simply considered as a man, which merited this astonishing accession to the right-hand of power, to be the Judge of quick and dead, and to determine the everlasting fate of millions? I speak with all possible reverence, and even with a religious apprehension upon my mind, while proposing questions of this bold nature. But surely, it could never be merely for preaching a system of moral virtue, or being a pattern of the most perfect righteousness,

ousness, much less for dying as a martyr to his cause, and sealing the testimony of his doctrine with his blood. These are very inadequate causes, wherefore *a name should be given to him which is above every name* *. Great as these qualities are in themselves, and surpassing all comparison, which the highest, and the best of men bear to the person of Jesus, yet there is no proportion between the merit and the reward, but it is without parallel, in all the dispensations of providence that have ever been revealed to the knowledge of mankind.

But, now, only consider the subject in the other point of view. Suppose that this spotless preacher and example of righteousness, was literally and truly what the sacred writers have declared him to be, the Son of God, and possessed, as he himself hath assured us, of *glory with his Father before the world*; but for the purposes of our salvation, and in mercy to a fallen race, descended from this state of felicity, took

* Phillip. ii. 9.

upon

upon him a body of flesh, and in that flesh died a victim upon the cross for human guilt; and, having accomplished this important end, returned to his original glory, and from thence will come again at the last day, agreeable to his promise, to judge the subjects of his moral government: beheld in this light there appears nothing disproportioned in the Gospel-dispensation, but one uniform scheme of infinite wisdom, blended with justice and mercy. The strictest propriety is visible in *his* being the Judge of mankind; who hath been their Creator and Redeemer. And though, no doubt, the highest mystery is veiled under a dispensation so awful, yet we see enough to admire, and in that admiration to adore, the gracious ordination of heaven, in this last, best; and *unspeakable gift* *.

What true believer, in a review of those proofs of divine love, can refrain from joining the Apostle in his animated exclamation: *O, the depth of the riches both of the*

* 2 Corinthians ix. 15.

wisdom and goodness of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor. For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever, Amen*.

* Romans xi. 13.

S E R M O N VII.

MATTHEW xvi. 15.

But whom say ye that I am?

THE numerous and unexceptionable evidences of Scripture, in favour of our Lord's divinity, have now in a very circumstantial manner, been brought before you. The subject has been traced through the whole of the sacred writings, (and I hope free from all prepossession or partiality,) in order to ascertain the real character of our blessed Master. And I would willingly persuade myself, that the result of the enquiry hath terminated in impressing your minds with the clearest conviction, that *Jesus is the Son of God.*

To these testimonies there seems nothing further necessary to be added, except

it be the opinion of the first, and immediate followers of Christ, his Apostles. It becomes, indeed, a very material and important question in the final decision of the whole argument, to enquire, what were the sentiments of these holy and inspired men upon the subject. For their opinion is of the greatest consequence, and must carry with it a considerable weight with every candid mind. And if it can be shewn (as I think it may without much difficulty) that they entertained a perfect persuasion of the divinity of Jesus, I should apprehend there ought to be no hesitation in adopting their sentiments, and taking them for our pattern, in subscribing to this great article of our faith.

That it was the *general* opinion of those faithful servants of Christ, (as far as we are able to gather, from their words or writings,) hath been, in a great measure, proved from the occasional quotations, which, in the course of these Sermons, have been already made. But, on a point of so much consequence, it may not be amiss to examine,
some

somewhat more distinctly, the *particular* opinion of each of them.

The investigation of this subject, will request your present attention.

The question in the text appears to me to be the most suitable to this purpose ; *But whom say ye that I am ?* It was originally proposed, by our Lord himself, to his disciples, on this very point. Whether Christ intended it altogether, for the trial of their faith, or whether he meant, that their opinion might become the standard and guide to succeeding ages of the church, on this grand question, is not easy to determine : yet I cannot but think, there is something very remarkable, both in the manner of our Lord's interrogating the disciples upon it, and the observations he made, in consequence of Peter's answer. For, after Christ had gathered from them the general sentiments of mankind concerning his person and character, he then desired to know, what was *their* opinion upon the subject. When *Simon Peter*, for himself, and his brethren, said, Thou art Christ, *the Son*

Son of the living God; had we any doubts what the Apostle meant by this expression, the observations which our Lord made upon Peter's answer would immediately remove them, by determining the sense in which he considered it. *Blessed* (says Christ) *art thou Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* If Peter meant nothing more by these words, than that he and his fellow Apostles considered Jesus as a *servant*, or a *messenger*, from God, surely Christ would not have pronounced him to be blessed, for the confession; for multitudes, who knew but little of our Lord's character, more than from seeing the miracles he daily wrought, confessed the same thing. *A great prophet* (say they) *is risen up among us, and God hath visited his people* *. Neither would the discovery have been so very remarkable, and important, that flesh and blood could not have attained to it, but it must have proceeded from the immediate revelation of

* Luke vii. 16.

God,

God, if, at the same time, it amounted to nothing higher than the belief, that Christ was simply a *man*, and differed not from any former prophet, except in the extent of his commission. To me, I confess, it appears one of the plainest propositions possible, that Peter (and of consequence his fellow Apostles with him,) intended by the expression, to profess his belief, that our Lord was a Being of that superlative nature, and so intimately united to God, as to be his *Son*. And that Christ considered the Apostle's words in this sense, and pronounced a blessing upon him, for the profession of such a faith *.

This

* I should not have thought it necessary to have brought forward this text again, and added so much upon it, having already noticed it in the First Sermon; (see page 33.) but since writing that discourse, *Mr. Lindsay's Address to the Students of the Two Universities* having by accident fallen into my hands, I was astonished to find a writer of such well-known good sense and observation, among other alterations, which he wishes to take place in our present translations of Scripture, desiring to alter the term *son*, for that of *servant*, in many places, where

○ This passage serves to give us some idea of the *general* opinion of the Apostles, concerning the person and character of their blessed Master. But, the object I proposed from the present discourse, was to learn (as far at least as the holy Scriptures can inform us,) what was the *particular* sentiment of each of them on this momentous point, separately, and individually.

where Christ is called the *Son of God*. Supposing, therefore, in compliance with this writer's wishes, it was adopted in the present instance, the declaration of Peter would then be, *Thou art Christ the servant of the living God*; in this case, it remains for Mr. L. to shew, wherein the great difference consisted, between the opinion of mankind in *general*, and that of the Apostles in *particular*, concerning the person of our Lord. And I would further beg to ask, whether Mr. L. can seriously think, that Christ would have declared Peter to be blessed for the discovery? The discovery of what? That *Jesus*, like another *prophet*, was a *servant* of the living God. Was this, such a mighty thing, that flesh and blood could not discern it, and none but the supreme Father in heaven was equal to reveal it to man? With all due deference to the abilities of this candid writer, I think, that there is some difficulty here, not easily to be reconciled with the other parts of this Gentleman's creed, on the subject of Christian faith.

Before

Before I proceed to this, however, it may be proper to premise a few words respecting the validity of their opinion.

When we consider the number, the situation, and the character of the Apostles, it is impossible to suppose, that they could be under the influence of a delusion themselves, or capable of joining in a confederacy, with a view to delude others.

The humble prospects of Christ's religion favoured no such idea, nor was there any object they could have proposed to themselves to have been answered by it. They had no doubt at the first, in common with their countrymen, the Jews, many prejudices to vanquish, previous to their becoming sincere believers, in our Lord's character as the Messiah. And we find it was necessary that evidences, again and again, should be brought before them, to accomplish this purpose. Therefore the establishment of their own conviction became necessary, before they could be supposed qualified to attempt the conviction of others. So that when we hear one of them declare,
that

that the truth of the facts they delivered, was *what they had seen with their eyes, what they had looked upon, and their hands had handled of the word of life* *, we may very safely conclude, that as they could have no inducement whatever, to deceive the world, so neither is it credible that they could have been deceived themselves.

But this is not all. Their opinion is still more highly deserving our reverence and esteem, from the supernatural assistance which they are well known to have received, in order to qualify them, as witnesses of the great truths of the Gospel.

The promise of this divine aid was given unto them by Christ himself, before his departure. And it was declared by him, among other purposes, to be one grand reason for which he left them; that he might *send to them the blessed Spirit of truth, which should guide them into all truth* †. But, indeed, not only from the authority of Scripture do we derive the testimony of the inspiration of the

* 1 John i. 1.

† John xvi. 13.

Apostles, but our reason confirms the certainty of it, by the strongest evidence. For how should a few, poor, ignorant fishermen of Galilee, dull, and unlearned even to a proverb, as they were, undertake upon their own strength, the arduous enterprize of converting a world, to the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer! If we consider them, indeed, as endued with power from on high, every difficulty at once vanishes. Supported by this divine aid, all opposition must fall before them; and their testimony thereby, becomes the greatest, and most convincing that is possible. That *divine Spirit of truth*, which was promised *to guide them into all truth*, would not, we may be assured, leave them ignorant respecting so important a point as that of the real character of their blessed Master; especially as their testimony would become the great standard of faith, with sincere believers, to endless ages of the church. So that we may, and without the least hesitation, place an implicit confidence in their opinion, and be convinced, that those *holy men of God*, in all that

that relates to the person and doctrines of their Lord, *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost* *.

This being premised, I proceed now to the grand question, What were the sentiments of those servants of Jesus, concerning the real character of their Master?

The testimony I shall begin with, is that of *John the Baptist*, whose early ministry claims this precedence. This man was not an *Apostle* of Christ, indeed, but being his fore-runner, may very properly be classed among the servants of our Lord. His evidence is the strongest that can be, and we shall have a better conception of it, if we previously consider the high terms in which he is spoken of in holy Scripture. It was said of him, by the angel who predicted his birth, that *he should be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb* †. And the Evangelist St. John, says, *that he was sent from God for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might*

* 2 Peter i. 21.

† 2 Luke i. 15.

believe *. A witness from God, surely challenges a more than ordinary attention from man ! And, as if these relations of John were not sufficient to impress our minds with the strongest conviction of the greatness of his character ; our Lord himself sums up the account, when he says, that *among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist* †. Indeed, there was somewhat so singular and striking about the person of John, that when he began his ministry, *all men mused in their hearts, whether he himself was not the Christ* ‡. Such was the eminence and sanctity of John the Baptist ! Let us hear, therefore, this man's testimony concerning our blessed Lord.

He opened his commission by preaching the doctrine of repentance, as the necessary means for *preparing the way of the Lord* ; and, in all his discourses constantly referred to *him* that was to follow him. And that no question might arise whose way it was that he prepared, the Apostle Paul, in

* John i. 7.

† Matt. xi. 11.

‡ Luke iii. 15.

his sermon to the Ephesians, hath determined the matter. *John* (says he) *verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus* *. And when the Jewish Sanhedrim, in consequence of this new doctrine, and the multitudes that flocked from all parts to hear John preach, sent Priests and Levites to demand who he was, and whether he was the Christ, he disclaimed all pretensions to that high title, and modestly assumed to himself the office only of being his fore-runner. *I am the voice* † (says he) *of one crying in the wilderness, Make strait the way of the Lord, as*

* Acts xix. 4.

† It is a beautiful thought of Fenelon, (the late Archbishop of Cambray,) in his observation on this passage, of the infinite humility of the Baptist, in making use of this figure. As if he had said, "Far from being the Messiah, I am nothing but the voice, a mere sound, which, as soon as it hath answered the purpose for which it is uttered, dies into air, and is known no more." I beg the indulgent reader to make a proper application of this idea to the present subject.

said

said the Prophet Isaias *. It were unnecessary, I should suppose, to observe, that the Prophet Isaias, when predicting the Messiah's approach, (in his fortieth chapter) literally described his Harbinger, under this exact character. One part, however, of this prophecy, (and that a most essential part, in proof of the doctrine we are now treating of,) I must desire may be attended to with that particular and respectful notice to which it is entitled, by its great importance; namely, that *this voice*, which it was predicted should cry in the wilderness, was to prepare the way of the *Lord*, not the way of a *man*, however great or distinguished, but *the way of the Lord*; to make strait in the desert, *an highway for our God: that then, the glory of the Lord was to be revealed, and all flesh should see it together* †. Admitting, therefore, what has never been disputed, that John the Baptist was he whom the Prophet had in view in this memorable prophecy, which the Evan-

* John i. 23.

† See Isaiah xl.

gelists declare, and our Lord himself confirms *; nothing can more fully define the dignity of his sacred person, whose way he came to prepare.

And that John considered Christ in this exalted point of view is evident, from the account he gives of himself, when compared to him. *I, indeed, baptize you with water, unto repentance, but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost †.* What humiliating notions must this *greatest among them that are born of women* have entertained of himself; and what unequalled ideas of his blessed Master, the very *latchet of whose shoes* he thought himself *unworthy to unloose!* Is it possible he could have expressed the divinity of Jesus in stronger terms than these!

Again: The day after John had given his answer to the question of the Priests

* Compare the Evangelists *in loco* with Isaiah xl.

† Matthew iii. 11.

and

and Levites, he repeated his testimony of our Lord, with other more particular marks of distinction : for, seeing Jesus coming towards him, he saith, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world! This is he of whom I spake, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me** : evidently alluding to our Lord's pre-existence; for with respect to the appearance of Christ in the flesh, John was born six months before him, and therefore he could not have said this, but in reference to his former being †. But what

* John i. 29, 30.

† It is with much concern I feel myself obliged to complain, that Mr. Lindsay, in *his Address to the Students of the Universities*, when giving the testimony of *John the Baptist*, concerning the person of our Lord, hath omitted what I conceive to be the most interesting and material parts in this man's evidence. He only quotes a single passage of Scripture, as the testimony of John, and that is, from John i. 15. *He that cometh after me, is preferred before me, for he was before me.* In explaining which, according to his opinion, he says, that "the last clause of this sentence should not have been put in am-

what renders the Baptist's testimony so highly conclusive and important, is the assurance

ambiguous terms, to induce the mere English reader to interpret it, as if the Baptist had said, that Jesus, though somewhat younger than him, was, nevertheless, before him in time, intending thereby to denote a prior eternal existence, which some would give him. A circumstance of this very extraordinary kind, if true, would not have been once only conveyed in a doubtful phrase, but frequently and explicitly mentioned.

“ We may assure ourselves, then, (says he,) that the Baptist speaks only of the dignity of Christ, and the superior importance of his message from God, that he was before him in that respect, and therefore, it should be rendered into English, *for he was greater than me.*” This is the whole account (at least in this work) which Mr. L. has given of John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus Christ. But, surely, it is not the whole that might have been given! I have too good an opinion of Mr. L's candour, to suppose that he designedly suppressed the rest. And at the same time, I have too high an idea of his understanding, to imagine he could overlook it. It is a matter of surprize to me, therefore, that he should not have brought forward, *all* that the Baptist hath said of Christ, whatever different constructions might have been put upon John's words. But fully persuaded as I am, that though Mr. L's creed and mine are widely distinguished,

urance he gives, that all his knowledge of Jesus was derived from a supernatural information

tinguished, yet the pursuit of truth is the object of both : I hope I may venture to say, (without the danger of giving offence,) that if Mr. L. had been more particular in his account of John's testimony, he would have seen, that *we could not*, as easily as he thinks, *have assured ourselves*, that the Baptist, when speaking of the dignity of Christ, meant only, in consequence of the *superior importance of his message*. Mr. L. should first have shewn, how this agrees with John's office, who came, as he himself declared, and as had been predicted of him, *only* as the *fore-runner of the Lord*. Was it a mere difference of message, those very different characters sustained, when the one ministered but to the other ? Did the Prophet Isaiah describe the Baptist as the *voice*, and Him the *Lord*, whose approach *that voice* declared ; or did Malachi, by the same spirit of prophecy, distinguish the coming of Christ, as that of *the Lord to his temple*, while *John* is mentioned but as the *messenger sent before his face to prepare his way* ? And in all these very particular distinctions, is there nothing more meant or intended, than that the one came on a greater embassy than the other ? However Mr. L. may have satisfied *himself*, I think he must advance some stronger argument than a mere assertion before he will convince *others* (at least among his impartial readers,) that the Baptist, when speaking of the dignity of Christ, *meant nothing more* than in consequence

mation he had received. That as to himself, he was totally ignorant both of the nature and dignity of Christ, until these things were confirmed to him by the corresponding tokens which attended the baptism of Jesus, and which he who had called him to the office of an Herald, pointed out, as the distinguishing marks, by which he should know the Messiah: *I knew him not (says he,) but he that sent me to baptize, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy*

of the superior importance of his message from God, But to come down to Mr. L.'s own terms. If we are to suppose that the Baptist, by all he hath said concerning Christ, intended only to imply that Christ was *greater* as a Prophet than he, it next behoves Mr. L. to shew how this is to be reconciled with our Lord's account of John, when he declares, that *among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.* Either Mr. L. contradicts our Lord, or he must admit the miraculous incarnation; and of consequence his hypothesis of the simple humanity of Jesus will fall to the ground.

Ghost,

*Ghost. And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God. **

Such is the testimony of John the Baptist, on the important question of our Lord's divinity. After the review we have taken of his evidence, it would almost be an insult to the understanding to demand, what must have been the opinion of the Baptist concerning the person of Christ. For surely it is impossible to suppose, that he could have ascribed to our Lord so many distinguishing properties of a divine Being, but under a perfect assurance of his divine nature. When, therefore, we recollect that one principal object of John's embassy was for *a witness to bare witness to the truth †, that all men through him might believe ‡*: his single testimony ought to have more weight than a thousand arguments, to strengthen and confirm the faith of believers in this great article of our religion. And though, as our blessed Redeemer hath himself observed, *he hath greater witness than that of John §, and re-*

* John i. 33, 34.

† John v. 33.

‡ John i. 7.

§ John v. 36.

ceives not testimony from man *, because, in fact, he needs it not ; yet to us, it becomes a very strong collateral consideration, in addition to the numerous evidences with which this principle of our faith is every where supported in the sacred writings. And, as I am well assured, the testimony of the Baptist cannot but be highly gratifying to every sincere believer in the divinity of Jesus ; so I hope this man's evidence who came, let it be remembered, *a witness to the truth, that all men through him might believe*, will be seriously and coolly considered by every one who may be in danger of being led away by a different persuasion, before this grand and distinguishing article of the Christian church is relinquished †.

From

* John v. 34.

† In the conclusive scenes of John's life, a circumstance occurs which has been thought by some, to favour a different opinion from what the Baptist had given before of our Lord. As one whose duty and inclination, both prompt him to candour, I think it highly proper to produce it upon the present occasion, but without the smallest appre-

From *John the Baptist*, let us proceed to
Peter the Apostle, whose opinion concerning
 the

apprehension that it will be found, when duly considered, to militate against John's former testimony, but rather strengthening it. The circumstances I allude to is, the question which John sent, when in prison, by two of his disciples, unto Jesus, saying, *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* If we attend to the context, we shall find, that John sent this message at a time when his disciples brought him intelligence of the mighty works of our Lord. And as these were so many additional proofs of Jesus answering to the character John had given him, it cannot be supposed the account of them would lessen the Baptist's opinion of Christ. It would be very extraordinary, that he, which had given the most decided evidence to the greatness of our Lord's character, and whose evidence sprung from somewhat more than human authority, should afterwards have scruples of his own to satisfy, and now, in the end of his ministry, should begin to doubt the truth of our Lord's mission? It has been said, that, perhaps the mind of John, soured by long imprisonment, and unjust suffering, might be warped from his former sentiments. Perhaps it might. No doubt, the pressure of trouble may induce effects of this kind. How weak is the faith of the best of men very frequently found, under severe trials. How often are sincere Christians tempted to exclaim in the anguish of their soul, *Hath God forgotten to be gracious?* When they know,

the character of Christ, must be equally acceptable, and together with it become a great weight in the argument.

That our Lord was of a divine nature, and differing most essentially from a mere man, in the sentiments of Peter, can hardly be questioned, from the several quotations of

know, and are convinced in the same moments, that the Lord is very gracious. Suppose somewhat like this to be the situation of John, his sufferings might have given an asperity to his temper, and yet his notions of Christ might continue just the same. But I do not see the necessity of supposing John had any doubts in his mind concerning our blessed Lord, when he sent his disciples with this message unto him. I rather think the whole design of the Baptist was with a view to *their* conviction, and not his own. The disciples of John felt, perhaps, a laudable concern at the growing popularity of our Lord, and the decline of their master's reputation. John had endeavoured to convince them, that *he was not the Christ, but only sent before him*; John iii. 28. In order, therefore, to satisfy their scrupulous minds concerning the dignity of Jesus, the Baptist adopted this method of introducing them more immediately into our Lord's presence, that from seeing, and hearing, the wonderful effects of his ministry, they might be convinced that he was the Messiah, which was for to come.

Scrip.

Scripture which we have already taken notice of; for such declarations as the Apostle occasionally made, during the life of Jesus, cannot possibly be reconciled with a different opinion. Hence we hear him frequently expressing his faith, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*. But, it is not barely assenting, in so many words, to this truth, that we consider as the only criterion of his judgment; for we find him also, testifying his belief by a corresponding behaviour, as one that had the fullest persuasion of our Lord's divinity. Once, indeed, as if in a dependance upon it, attempting, at the command of Jesus, to walk upon the water; which plainly implied an unbounded confidence in the power of Christ *. Such conduct is not to be accounted for, upon principles of common sense, with the supposition that all this while Peter believed his Master to be no more than a common man, and in every respect the same as himself, except in the commission he had received from God.

* Matthew xiv. 28.

But

But there are circumstances yet more pointed to indicate the sentiments of Peter, during some more particular occasions, in the life of Christ. As for example, in his retirement on the mount, when only Peter, and James, and John, were permitted to be present with him, and when our Lord was transfigured before them; the glory, or shechinah, in which he then appeared, was so similar to the glory of Jehovah, on Mount Sinai, that it produced the same effect upon the Apostles as that did on Moses, for *they feared as they entered into the cloud* *. And it was this resemblance, no doubt, which suggested to the mind of Peter the idea of building three tabernacles, on which the glory might remain, as it used to do, upon the tabernacle in the wilderness †. But the
most

* Luke ix. 34.

† It is impossible for the most ordinary reader to peruse the account of this scene of Christ's transfiguration, and compare it with the relation that is given of the descent of Jehovah on Mount Sinai, without being struck with the wonderful resemblance between them. The *glory* in which Jehovah was encircled, the *cloud* covering

most remarkable circumstance in this awful scene, is the effect the voice, which came out of the cloud, produced upon the Apostles, in declaring our Lord to be *the beloved Son of God*; for when they heard it, they fell upon their faces, and *were sore afraid*. What sentiments the Apostles entertained of their Master, in consequence of this solemn transaction, is not, indeed, expressly said; but if their behaviour can be supposed to imply any thing, it gave the most positive assurance, that they were deeply smitten with the consciousness of the greatness of his character. And had they desired to shew their perfect apprehension of the presence of the Deity, they could not have done it more emphatically than by pro-

vering the mount, the *apprehension* of Moses, as he entered into the cloud, *all* are exactly similar to the description of the transfiguration. I think myself justified, therefore, in supposing, that it was the recollection of the history of this solemn scene, which put into Peter's mind the idea of the Jewish tabernacle. Compare the Evangelists *in loco* with Exodus xxiv. 15. *et seq.*

strating

strating themselves to the earth as they did before Christ, and continuing in that situation until the vision was past.

Another incident in the life of Jesus, where the Apostle Peter appears to have had the most lively sense of the divinity of his Master, was shewn at the miraculous draught of fishes. The behaviour of Peter, upon this occasion, seems to have arisen from a religious apprehension upon his mind, such as we read in Scripture affected holy men of old, when under a consciousness of the divine presence. Of this kind is the dread which Jacob felt on seeing the face of God at Peniel * ; and of Gideon, and Manoah, upon the appearance of an angel †. The words which Peter made use of, in consequence of the wonderful capture of fishes, can only be explained upon the same principle. Convinced by this act of our Lord, that there was somewhat of a superior nature in his person, and fearing, after such a display of divine power,

* Gen. xxxii. 30.

† Judges vi. 22. and xiii. 22.

what other effects might follow, *he fell down at the knees of Jesus, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord* *..

These occurrences during the ministry of our Lord, afford very strong arguments to the persuasion, that Peter, as well as the other Apostles, occasionally considered their blessed Master under a character very different from that of a mere man. I say, *occasionally*; for it should be observed, that it is not during the season in which our blessed Lord continued among them, that we are to look for their full attestation of Christ's divinity. Their faith was then imperfect and wavering; their notions of Jesus, crude and undetermined. It was a long time before they could be brought to relinquish their national prejudices, which had taught them to expect a mighty prince, and deliverer, in the person of the Messiah, so as to receive our Lord under that character. Nor, indeed, was the conviction, that *it was he which should deliver Israel* †, firmly rooted

* Luke v. 8.

† Luke xxii. 21.

in their minds, until the great events which followed the death of Jesus, had corrected their judgment, respecting the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and thoroughly instructed them in what related to the great object of his mission.

The writings of the Prophets, in their predictions of the promised Saviour, had, it is true, fully shewn, that some mysterious union would constitute his character; and that he should be both a suffering and a triumphant prince. Yet, it were a weakness to suppose, that a body of ignorant fishermen should be so well read in Scripture, as to comprehend, what even the Sanhedrim could not explain. Hence, therefore, it is not during the life of Jesus, that we are to expect from the mouth of the Apostles, a settled, and undeviating testimony to his divinity. The expressions leading to this opinion, which we find they occasionally made use of, are rather to be considered as given in some peculiar moments, when the rays of his divine nature bursting through the veil of flesh in which he was cloathed,

cloathed, forced a transient conviction from his astonished disciples; but which the familiar occurrences of a few days soon again effaced. Similar to the common effects of the world. Some of the most splendid operations, however powerfully they may awaken the faculties of the mind, yet they produce only a momentary impresson, which the recurrence of familiar objects very speedily remove. Somewhat of this kind was the situation of the Apostles, with respect to the opinion they were prompted to entertain of their Master's divinity. They beheld numberless events in the life of Jesus, which plainly declared him to be more than mortal. His words, his actions, his miracles, in short, every occurrence connected with his more immediate ministry, were altogether great and illustrious; yet when viewed in conjunction with the common circumstances of a man, and of a very poor and humble man too, can we wonder that such things should frequently banish from the memory of the disciples the real greatness of their Master's character? To re-

peat, therefore, what was just before observed, we are not to look for a fixed opinion on this great question, from the disciples, until the descent of the Holy Ghost. When, indeed, this divine illumination from above, had fully informed their minds of the principles of the Gospel, and they were qualified to become witnesses unto Christ, *both in Jerusalem and Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth**, then may we expect to find, in all the accounts they give of the person and character of their Lord, one uniform and steady opinion. And such, I conceive, to have been the general sentiments of the Apostles upon this important question; bearing, upon every occasion, as far as was expedient, with the leading object of their commission, a full evidence to the divinity of their Master.

In particular, *Peter*, whose testimony we are now considering (and who holds so distinguished a rank among the Apostles,)

* Acts i. 8.

hath left us sufficient information, both from his discourses, and his writings, to conclude, that after being enlightened with the influences of the Holy Spirit, he was but the more strongly confirmed in the sentiments he had before occasionally entertained of the divine nature of Christ.

Whoever examines his first sermon, preached on the day of Pentecost, with an unprejudiced mind, will perceive strong marks of the perfect conviction which *Peter* must have possessed of this great truth. But in that critical season, when addressing a body of Jews, upon the subject of our Lord's mission and character, it certainly required no small degree of caution, how he insisted much upon so delicate a point as the deity of one whom they had lately crucified. It is worthy of observation, what discretion the Apostle uses upon this occasion, so as to engage the attention of his audience, and no less to remove all prejudice against the doctrine he was anxious to recommend. He begins his sermon, therefore, by appealing to their own know-

ledge for the truth of the wonderful events which had distinguished the life of Jesus of Nazareth, *a man (says he) approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know* *. And to obviate any ill effects which might arise in their minds, from the recollection of the part they had had in the death of Jesus, he declares that his death was entirely brought to pass *by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*; and that, in consequence of this divine ordination it was, that *they had crucified and slain him*. Having thus guarded against what was most likely to have enflamed their minds, had the Apostle mentioned these truths with the smallest acrimony, he now proceeds to the great object he had in view, from his discourse, namely, to assert the certainty of our Lord's resurrection; and (what is most to my present purpose) he does this by proving that this glorious event was accomplished from a physical necessity; or to use the

* Acts ii. 22. *et seq.*

stronger expression of the Apostle, *having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.* If these terms do not imply the Apostle's persuasion of the divine nature of our Lord, I am at a loss to comprehend any meaning in them. For, had Peter considered Jesus but as a man, nay, had he not considered him above the nature of a man, there was no impossibility in the thing itself, of his being *holden* by what he calls *the pains of death.* And, as a further confirmation of this doctrine, he brings before them the prophecy of David, and applies it to the person of Christ. *For David (says he) speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right-hand, that I should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* Having quoted this passage, Peter desires permission to speak freely upon

it, and calls upon them to observe, that these things could have no reference to the Patriarch David, because *he was both dead and buried, and his sepulchre remained unto that day: but being a Prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ, to sit upon his throne. He seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.* By these arguments, having proved the physical necessity of the resurrection, both from our Lord's nature, and the concurrent testimony of prophecy, the Apostle, in the conclusion of his sermon, describes the Redeemer under such expressions as carry with them the most satisfactory proofs how strongly impressed his mind must have been with the belief of the superior nature of our Lord. *Therefore (says he,) let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

In

In *Peter's* second, and subsequent sermons, he names our Lord by such titles as would be the highest impiety, if applied to any created being. He calls him the *Holy One*, and *the Just*, the *Prince of life* *. And when we find that the preaching of Peter was accompanied with such demonstrations of *his* power, under whose commission he acted; miracles both of mercy and judgment, purposely wrought to establish the faith, and all expressly done in the sole name, and by the power of Jesus Christ, is it reasonable to suppose, that the Apostle should thus preach, and act, and constantly refer all the glory to his blessed Master, and yet have no apprehensions of his divinity? That he should work every miracle as by *his* authority, and proclaim every blessing to be expected, but through *him*, nay, to declare, that salvation could be through no other; *neither is there any other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved* †; and still all this while,

* Acts iii. 14, 15.

† Acts iv. 12.

believe that Jesus was simply no other than a man like himself; and that it was the merit of a man only, through whom salvation for millions of the human race could be procured? Can it be possible to suppose this? Surely it requires such a stretch of credulity, as the highest mystery of the Christian faith cannot be charged with, to give into the belief of such a persuasion! Be the matter of fact, therefore, whatever it may, concerning the real dignity of our blessed Lord, that *Peter* had a conviction of his divinity cannot, I think, well be doubted, for the contrary notion would be hard to reconcile with those repeated declarations we meet with in his discourses.

Before we quit our review of this man's evidence, it may not be amiss to add, that as in his preaching, so in his writings, we find his testimony the same. In his last Epistle, (written as is very probably supposed *, the year only before his martyrdom,

* It is with great reason imagined, that Peter wrote his Second Epistle, anno 67; and history informs us, that

dom, and at a time when he had the prospect of death in view, and purposely written, that they who had obtained like precious promises with himself, might be able after his decease, to have the truths of Christianity always in remembrance,) he shews very plainly, that as he had *lived*, so he *died*, in the faith of this important doctrine. The Apostle, among other matters, particularly alludes to the glorious scene of Christ's transfiguration, and the observations he makes upon it, may serve to convince us, what impression it had left upon his mind of the greatness of his Master's character. *We have not followed* (says he) *cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father, honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And*

that he suffered martyrdom anno 68, the 14th year of the Emperor Nero.

this

this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount *. Enough hath been said, I should hope, in the induction of particulars to ascertain what was the opinion of the Apostle Peter concerning the person of Jesus Christ. And if I have faithfully stated this man's testimony, (which I trust I have) his evidence is such an one, as (to use his own words) *we shall do well to take heed unto, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place* †.

The

* 2 Peter i. 16. *et seq.*

† 2 Peter i. 19. In my intention of examining the evidences of the Apostles, I meant such among them only as afford any information to the subject we are upon. Some of them, it is well known, have left no documents behind them, from whence to gather their sentiments, concerning the person of their Lord; and, therefore, it can only be inferred from their silence, that they entertained the same opinion in common with their fellow-Apostles. Even the three former Evangelists have said so little *of their own*, in the Gospels which bear their name, that I should have concluded their testimony to have been too inconsiderable to merit a particular attention. But, as Mr. Lindsay, in his Address before noticed, hath thought proper to assert, *That there is nothing to be found either in the Gospels of St. Matthew, Mark,*

or

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The same observation with which I begun the review of *Peter's* testimony, may, with

or Luke, which implies their having the least thought that their divine Master Jesus, was any other than an human being. (See page 21.) I could not resist my desire of adding, by way of note, the very different light in which the opinion of these men appears to me. That they should have said so little concerning the person of our Lord, is readily to be accounted for. As writers of the memoirs of Jesus, their province, no doubt, was chiefly confined to the narrative of the facts in his life; and if any circumstance in this history, tended to throw a light upon his real character, this was to be the proper criterion of it. But how so liberal a mind as Mr. L. could peremptorily draw the conclusion which he has done from their silence, and decidedly deliver their sentiments upon a subject, which they themselves have not done: this is singular indeed! Though neither of those men have said, in so many words, that Jesus was a divine being, yet in the testimony of our Lord's miraculous incarnation, which both Matthew and Luke have recorded, is there nothing that implies so much as their not having the least thought that *Jesus was any other than an human being?* Is that wonderful series of events which distinguished the person of our Lord during his incarnation, (and which more or less are noticed by every one of the Evangelists) no other than *the properties of an human creature?* In short, are all the accounts given of Christ from

with equal propriety be made respecting the evidence of the Apostle *John*. After the plentiful

from his incarnation to his ascension so very inconsiderable that the writers of them could not have the least thought that Jesus was any thing more than man; but that “*these three men appear to have gone out of the world (to use Mr. L.’s own words) believing Christ to have been one of the human species, and not belonging to any higher class of beings.*” (Page 23.) Whatever Mr. L.’s sentiments may be, does he seriously believe that such were the sentiments of Matthew, Mark, or Luke?

Astonished with this account which Mr. L. hath given of the three former Evangelists, I was solicitous to know what he would say of the fourth, St. John. And I found my mind not a little relieved in perceiving, that Mr. L. had made equally free (if he will pardon the expression,) in the following page, with the beloved Apostle. “*The sentiments (says he) of the three former Evangelists, afford the strongest presumption, that their fellow-Evangelist, St. John, was entirely of the same sentiments with them, especially as this last never tells us, that he was honoured with any peculiar revelations concerning the person of Christ, which were not imparted to the other Apostles.*” Is this the real fact? Was John never honoured with any peculiar revelations concerning the person of Christ more than his fellow-Apostles? Does Mr. L. really think this? Has he forgotten the Apocalypse? or, is he one of those few who have ventured to question the authenticity of that sacred book.

plentiful quotations from the writings of this disciple, any further reference is unnecessary, in order to shew what were his sentiments upon the subject of Christ's divinity. Indeed the very preface to his Gospel is in itself a full decision of it. Without going over his writings again, suffer me only to detain you with one observation more, respecting the evidence of this highly favoured servant of his Lord, which will supersede the necessity of many lesser arguments; and that is, the account which he has given of the supreme dignity of Jesus, in his book of the Revelations. In this mysterious canon of Scripture, we find

book, notwithstanding the indubitable evidences with which it is handed down to us? But whatever sentiments Mr. L. may entertain of St. John's opinion of his Lord, while a chapter of his Gospel remains, there will be no greater testimony needed, to shew the sense *he* had of his Master's dignity. And it must be a very high satisfaction to every believer in this article of faith, to recollect, that the revelations which were given to St. John, in the close of his life, were given for this purpose, that he might *bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ.* Rev. i. 1, 2.

much

much information concerning our Lord's real character, which might be produced with great advantage to our present cause; but a single passage will be sufficient. In the first chapter the Apostle, after opening his subject, with the highest ascriptions of praise and dominion, *to him that loveth us, and hath washed us from our sins, in his own blood*; goes on to describe the personal appearance of our Lord to him, in an effulgence of brightness and glory, in which Jesus assumes every divine honour, and speaks of the future dispensations which were to take place in his church. What sentiments the Apostle then had, and ever after retained, concerning the divinity of his blessed Master, let any one who reads St. John's account of this vision determine. *When he saw him* (he says) *he fell at his feet as dead*, and heard him proclaim his name under these great characters, *the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last*: Could he possibly doubt the deity of such a being? Did the Apostle consider these eternal properties belonging to our Lord,
but

but as so many distinctions of the glorified man Christ Jesus? And at the time when he was under the immediate impresson of this vision, or afterwards when he recorded it for the edification of future ages, had he no apprehension himself that Jesus was any thing more than a man, whom God had highly exalted for the perfect merit of his life, and his beneficial ministry; and yet with not the least idea of the divinity of his Lord, he should transmit such accounts of him as must determine others to the belief of it with perfect conviction? Are such palpable contradictions to be admitted? Strange, that it should not immediately appear to persons of this opinion, that they are not only impeaching the veracity of St. John as a writer, but bringing the heaviest accusation against the great Saviour of the world, in suffering such representations of him to be made in his church, as must infallibly lead into error the faith of mankind! Could we but once suppose this, the *bles-*
sing which is promised to him that readeth
the words of this book, and keepeth the things-

U

which

*which are written therein**, would be converted into a *curse*; and unable to satisfy the mind with the certainty of any one proposition we meet with in Scripture, we should be like the *dove of Noah*, in search of land, without a place to rest our foot on through the whole of God's word. Praised be the divine goodness, the matter is not left to a reasoning so precarious and uncertain! *The disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things, could not be deceived; we know that his testimony is true †; For these things were written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through his name ‡.*

The evidence of *Thomas the Apostle* on the great question of our Lord's divinity, (which is the next to which I request your attention,) is so decisive upon the subject, that it hath with great reason been considered, as one of the most important testimonies upon record. Even they who reject the belief of Christ's divine nature, are

* Rev. i. 3. † John xxi. 24. ‡ John xx. 31.

yet at a loss to reconcile their different opinion with this man's sentiments. It is but a single incident in the life of Thomas, in which we find this profession of his faith, and delivered upon a memorable occasion; but it is an incident which hath proved, (as, no doubt, it was designed by the providence of God,) the most favourable and propitious to the establishing the minds of believers firm and unshaken, in this great article of their creed.

It is, I believe, generally known, that the absence of *Thomas* from the first assembly of the disciples, after our blessed Lord arose from the dead, prevented that sight of Christ, which would most probably, had he been present, have produced the same conviction upon him that it did upon the rest. But though there seems to have been no apparent reason, wherefore he should doubt the truth of the report of the resurrection of Jesus, (considering the assurances he had received of the fact itself from his fellow-Apostles,) yet, from an unaccountable incredulity, *Thomas* not only refused

to believe it, upon their testimony, but also declared that he *never* would be convinced of it, but upon such evidences as appeared at that time, highly improbable should be granted him.

Upon the next meeting, however, of the disciples, *Thomas* was present with them, and in a manner similar to his former visit, Jesus again appeared before them. His miraculous entrance *, and his immediate address to

* The miraculous entrance of our blessed Lord amidst the circle of his disciples, is so very high a proof in my esteem of the divinity of his nature, and so important to my present argument, that I must desire to insist upon it somewhat more particularly. Sceptics have been pleased to bring forward this account of Christ's interview with his Apostles, with great confidence as making against the credibility of the fact itself, of the resurrection of Jesus. Unable to account upon philosophical principles for the entrance of a body into a room when all the avenues were shut by which any thing substantial might pass; they have been pleased to treat the whole as fabulous. But so far is the thing itself from giving just occasion to this cavil, that the impossibility of accounting for it upon physical principles, proves the very point in question, namely, that it was accomplished by the divine

to the unbelieving disciple, in offering the very proofs he had demanded for his conviction, so powerfully operated upon the mind of the Apostle, in confirming both

divine power of Jesus. It is indeed a full proof of our Lord's omnipotence. For that Christ effected this entrance by means truly miraculous, is evident from the circumstances of the case. In the Evangelist's account of it, it is remarkable that he is no less particular in his observation, that *the doors were shut*, than he is in stating the certainty that it was the *real body of Christ* which appeared. He tells us, that Jesus pointed out to his disciples the difference between a spiritual essence and a material substance, that *a spirit had not flesh and bones, as they saw he had*: and in testimony that what they saw was real, *he shewed them his hands and his side*, and desired they would yet further convince themselves of the truth of it by feeling him. All which fully prove, that the disciples were not under the influence of an illusion in what they beheld, but that it was the real body of Jesus, which had been crucified: Now as the entrance of a body into a room, as before described, could not have been accomplished but by some supernatural agency, (it being contrary to all the known properties of physics,) it must follow, that He who possessed the supreme power of altering or suspending at his pleasure, the established laws of nature, possessed also omnipotence which can belong only to God.

the certainty of his resurrection, and the divine power by which he had accomplished it, that subdued by these evidences, he cried out in an ecstasy of joy, *My Lord! and my God!* Though no form of words could more strongly express the divinity of him, to whom it was applied, yet it hath been said, that this confession of the Apostle's was simply no other than the effect of a sudden surprize, as if he had said, *then is it really true!* But never was there a more miserable expedient to get rid of a difficulty.

Had the words of *Thomas* been merely an exclamation of astonishment, how comes it to pass that Christ should have considered them as the profession of his faith? For there is a manifest difference between wonder and conviction. And yet it is plain, that our blessed Lord accepted what *Thomas* said, as the confession of the fullest conviction; *Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.* Besides, had *Thomas* spoken as a man under the immediate effect of surprize, and without any particular meaning,
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it is not likely that he would have done it in so deliberate and repeated a manner. He might have said, *My Lord!* or *My God!* singly, but not both. The uniting of these expressions, should not seem to be very probable in the Apostle's circumstances. Nor do I think, that in this case, *Thomas* would have addressed himself so immediately to Christ, as it is evident he did, but rather to the disciple that happened to be nearest to him. But whether these considerations are to the purpose or not, there is one, which certainly is, namely, that in the original the article which is prefixed, invariably determines the sense, wherever it is used with those words, as being applicable only to God. It is therefore wholly unaccountable, that the Apostle should address Christ in those very words, unless he had a real apprehension of the divinity of his person. And to suppose otherwise, that *Thomas*, though using such expressions, had no conception of Christ's divine nature, would be still more unaccountable, and our Lord's conduct equally mysterious. To call him *Lord* and *God*,

whom he considered in the very moment of saying it, but as a *man*, became idolatry. And yet, we hear of no reproof from Jesus for the expression. Christ indirectly blames him indeed, for his former incredulity, but not a word for this *latter* error. Whereas the one was infinitely more reprehensible, (supposing it to be misapplied) than the other. And that Christ should be altogether inattentive to this conduct in his servant, which, from his omniscience, he could not but be sensible, would be of great moment in succeeding ages of his church, as a standard of faith to the believer, is the most unlikely circumstance that can be imagined. In short, whoever can reconcile these points to his own satisfaction, so as to reject the testimony of *Thomas*, to the divinity of our Lord, possesses a degree of credulity not very enviable. But he who will fairly and impartially consider the several circumstances connected with this incident in the life of the Apostle, will, I think, perceive strong leading characters to induce the persuasion, that *Thomas*, could not but have

have the most compleat conviction, that Christ was more than man.

The next testimony which I have to produce, is of equal consequence with the former, for it was given in a peculiar situation, even in his dying moments. You will perceive I allude to that of *Stephen*. This man was not in the general acceptation of the word an Apostle. He was, however, a disciple of Christ, and what is more immediate to our subject, he may be said to have died a martyr, to the very profession of our Lord's divinity.

His evidence is briefly related in the sixth and seventh chapters of the Acts of the Apostles; where we read, that the zeal of *Stephen* for the faith of the Gospel, having inflamed the minds of the adversaries to Christianity with anger, they suborned men to accuse him of *speaking blasphemous words against Moses, and against God*. The blasphemy against Moses, is particularly specified, in that he had said, *Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple, and change the customs which Moses delivered*. But what could be

be the blasphemy against God ? (as a learned writer hath very pertinently questioned *.) What was there in the doctrine of the Apostles which could possibly bear this construction, except that of ascribing divinity to our blessed Saviour ? The Apostles had never ceased to observe among themselves, and to recommend to others, every known duty which the law enjoined to the supreme Father : and it is impossible to discover any thing in their conduct which could be deemed blasphemy, unless it be the divine honours which they paid to the person of Jesus. That this was *Stephen's* crime, there can be but little doubt. For it is observable, that notwithstanding the rage of his enemies against him, they heard the holy man with great patience, through a long address, which he made before the council, while he recited the principal heads of the Jewish history. And most likely would have granted him a longer audience, had he

* The Bishop of St. David's, in his Letters with Dr. Priestley. See page 208.

not connected with it the relation it bore to our blessed Lord; but no sooner did he advert to the name of Jesus, and distinguished him by the title of the Just One (the well-known character of Deity,) declaring them to have been his *betrayers* and *murderers*, than *they gnashed upon him with their teeth*. In this critical moment, *Stephen being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly unto heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right-hand of God. And he said, behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right-hand of God.* Confirming in this open and avowed manner, the testimony which he had before borne, to the divinity of Jesus, they were unable to suppress their resentment any longer, but *crying out with a loud voice, and stopping their ears, they ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him*; while he with his dying breath recommended his departing soul, not immediately to the Supreme Father, but to Christ: *Lord Jesus (says he) receive*

receive my spirit. Whether this profession of *Stephen* was the cause of his death I shall not insist upon, but one thing is very evident; if this man did not die a martyr to the Deity of Christ, he at least died in the faith of it. And in either case, the conclusion to our present argument is the same. Such a testimony to this great article of our faith, from one under the full influence of the Holy Ghost, is peculiarly satisfactory, and cannot but impress the mind, with a very strong weight of evidence.

I shall close our review of the opinion of the Apostles concerning the character of Jesus, with the testimony of *St. Paul*, who though with infinite humility styles himself, *the least of all the Apostles, and not meet to be called an Apostle, because he persecuted the church of God* *; yet in the estimation of his Master, he was *a chosen vessel, to bear his name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel* †.

* 1 Corinth. xv. 9.

† Acts ix. 15.

Added to the inspired character of *St. Paul*, let us recollect, that he was converted to Christianity by a miracle from heaven, and after his conversion, the Gospel which he preached, he solemnly affirms before God, he *neither received of man, neither was taught it by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ* *. A more unexceptionable witness can never be desired.

You have already noticed, I hope, in the many quotations which have been brought before you, from the Epistles of this man, what exalted accounts he has left upon record, of his Lord's character. And as these views of Christ, according to the Apostle's opinion, clearly ascertain a superior dignity in his nature, it becomes a very natural question, from whence could *Paul* have acquired this information concerning Christ? Before his conversion, it is certain he could have had no such notions of the character of our Lord, for he was a violent persecutor of the Christian faith, and held both the

* Galatians i. 11, 12.

name and religion of Jesus, in hatred and derision. And after that miraculous event took place, it is said of him, that he conferred not with any one upon the subject of Christianity, but *straightway he began to preach Christ in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God* *. It is too fabulous to suppose, that the Apostle should be led by an intuitive kind of knowledge, to entertain those sublime ideas of Christ, especially after his former opinion of him; and if it be true, that he received not this information from man, neither was taught it by man, there can be no reason to reject the solemn assurance he has given, that it was communicated to him by the revelation of Christ himself. And hence it will follow, that if our Lord condescended to be *Paul's* instructor, after having called him, even at the expence of a miracle, to be his servant, and given him all necessary information respecting himself, and his religion, there can be nothing erroneous in his account, and we may,

* Acts ix. 20.

with great safety, receive his testimony as infallible, for no human authority can equal it. When, therefore, we trace through every part of his inspired writings, an invariable strain of evidence, to the divinity of Jesus, and every great and distinguishing attribute which constitutes Deity, applied to the person of Christ, can it be the question of a moment, what were the sentiments of the Apostle *Paul* concerning his divine Master?

But in reply to these arguments, we are told, that our interpretation of these passages of the Apostle, arises from a misapprehension of his meaning: that he wrote in accommodation to the spirit of the language then in use, which was very highly metaphorical, and flowery, and therefore a great part of his expressions is to be considered in this sense. These things have been said, and much insisted upon, but with what strength of argument, comes next to be considered.

In *Paul's* first Epistle to the Corinthians, he tells them, that when he came to them
 preach-

preaching the Gospel, *he came not with excellency of speech, nor was his preaching with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power* *.

For we use (says he) *great plainness of speech* †. And so he does indeed, upon the presumption, that we are to accept what he says, according to the most natural meaning which it bears, but if we are to look beyond the first sense of the words, and fancy one part to be mysterious, and another figurative; how will this agree with the Apostle's declaration, that *he uses great plainness of speech*! St. Paul, it is true, calls the sublime parts of the Christian faith a mystery, and says, *Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh* ‡. But when he said this, he evidently alluded to the mystery of the incarnation: whereas if he meant nothing more by it, than that Jesus Christ was but a *man*, what *mystery* was there in this scheme of *godliness*, and how could this be called, *God manifest in the flesh*?

* 1 Cor. ii. 1. 4. † 2 Cor. iii. 12. ‡ Tim. iii. 16.

Again :

Again : It is somewhat remarkable, that *Paul* should caution *Timothy*, as he does, to *withdraw himself from men of perverse disputings, and corrupt minds*: and to remark, moreover, that *if any man consents not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ; and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; that he is proud, and knowing nothing but doting about questions and strife of words**: All this is very singular in coming from a man, who is supposed to be continually wrapping up his instructions, not in *wholesome words*, but in allegory, and figure; and yet, who at the same time, declares the great cause of the rejection of the Gospel, is from the pride and wisdom of the world, to whom *the preaching of the cross is foolishness †*!

It is yet still more remarkable, that in this Apostle's Epistle to the Colossians, he bids them *beware lest any man should spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of*

* 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5.

† 1 Cor. i. 18.

the world, and not after Christ; and in the next verse, immediately adds, *for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily* *. Had the Apostle feared he should be misunderstood in this passage, instead of telling the Colossians, to beware of the *traditions of men*, and the *rudiments of the world*, he should have warned them against supposing that he meant any thing by the *indwelling of the Godhead bodily in Christ*: Whereas, there is not a syllable said of this, but only a caution against being spoiled by that *philosophy and vain deceit*, which prompt men to cavil with such truths of religion, as are not fairly upon a level with the apprehensions of the human mind.

These considerations serve to explain, in what sense we are authorized to accept the writings of *St. Paul*; and to suppose that a man, who professedly used *great plainness of speech himself*, and recommended it to *others*, should not dwell so continually in figure, as to mislead the understanding of his readers upon all occasions.

* Colossians ii. 8, 9.

But

But besides those instances, which we have reviewed in proof of the Apostle *Paul's* testimony to the divinity of Jesus Christ, there is *one* more, which remains to be noticed, equally decisive, and which can upon no consideration whatever be explained, but upon the belief, that the Apostle had a full persuasion of the Deity of our Lord: I mean the *prayers* which he offered up personally to Christ.

The awful scene in the road to Damascus, at the time of his conversion, is the first instance of the kind we meet with in *Paul's* history, in which he addressed our Lord, and received an answer to his petition *. And again, we find the same application immediately made to Christ, when the Apostle was under some particularly afflicting circumstance; for which he says, *he thrice besought the Lord that it might depart from him* †. That it was Christ, and not the Supreme Father, he prayed to, is evident

* Acts ix. 6.

† 2 Cor. xii. 8.

from the whole affair as related *. And it should seem indeed, both from this incident, and from various accounts to be traced in his writings, that it was the Apostle's usual custom in his devotions, immediately to address them to the Lord Jesus Christ. He inscribes his Epistle to the Corinthians, not only *to them*, but *to all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus* †. And his general benediction, with which he concludes his Epistles, implies the same: *Grace to you, and peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*.

I fear I have exhausted the patience, with which you have hitherto heard me, on the present subject. But the testimony of the *Apostles*, and first *servants* of Jesus, concerning the real character of their Master,

* Dr. Jortin observes upon this passage, that Schectingius, and other Socinians, allow that this is a prayer dedicated to Jesus Christ. See his Sermons, vol. iv. page 218.

† 1 Corinthians i. 2.

became too interesting to be hastily passed over, and without due examination.

The several opinions of those *chosen witnesses of God*, have now been brought before you (as far as they are obtainable;) and when you have thoroughly reflected upon the evidences themselves, and the fair and unimposing manner in which they have been offered to your consideration, you will give them, I doubt not, the credit to which they shall appear to you, to be justly entitled.

The whole question respecting the validity of their testimony, may be reduced to a single point. Either they were believers in the divinity of Jesus, or they were not. If they were *not*, I shudder at the very idea, that men, illumined by the divine Spirit, should have deified a creature, and have led the whole Christian world into the grossest idolatry! Who but must tremble to conceive such horrible criminality in those faithful, unambitious followers of Jesus Christ? What could be their inducement to destroy all their own prospects of salvation, and

involve in irremediable guilt, millions of their fellow-creatures? And upon the supposition, that they neither believed in this doctrine *themselves*, or intended to lead *others* into such a persuasion, what a wonderful coincidence of circumstances must it have been, to induce the effects which their writings have produced.

But if they *believed* themselves, what they have so fully taught, (as every principle of candour, and liberality, independent of higher motives would lead us to conclude,) with what an accumulation of evidence is the divinity of our blessed Master confirmed and assured!

It were almost needless to add, *whose faith we ought to follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ! the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever **,

* Heb, xiii, 7, 8,

S E R M O N VIII.

MATTHEW xxii. 42.

What think ye of Christ ?

IF the importance of the subject to which I have of late so frequently requested your attention, did not supersede every other consideration, I should have thought it necessary to have prefaced several of the preceding discourses with an apology. But, though I feel great apprehension, lest from the very defective manner in which the subject hath been treated, I should have failed in my endeavours to exhibit the proofs of our Lord's divinity, in that strong point of view, which may be requisite for the establishment of perfect conviction in your hearts; (and which, I cannot but think, would be the natural consequence arising

from the evidences themselves,) yet I persuade myself, that the humblest efforts, in such an interesting cause, will need no commendation with all sincere minds. To have a just and proper conception of *his* person and character, who is *the Author and Finisher of our faith*, cannot but be desirable, and gratifying to all his followers.

Nor is this the only object to be answered by it. The great question of our Lord's divinity certainly involves the highest concerns of Christianity. Whoever wishes to derive comfort and assurance from the promises of the Gospel, and especially in the more interesting parts of it, which relate to the future prospects of our nature, must first be convinced of the truth of that authority on which the whole rests, that *He is faithful who hath promised* *. Neither do I conceive it possible, that any man can experience the full extent of the consolations which the religion of Jesus affords, who hath not imbibed a portion of the same

* Hebrews x. 23.

faith, which actuated the Apostle Paul: *I know* (says he) *whom I have believed, and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day* *.

But though the importance of the subject itself, may, I hope, in some degree, justify, and account for the great length to which I have been necessarily led in the prosecution of it; yet it may be equally satisfactory now to observe, that, with the present discourse, I shall close it altogether, and relieve your attention. Having gone over the principal evidences of Scripture, and having omitted nothing material in the argument (as far as I can recollect,) I desire to leave the final decision, of the great question in the text, to every man's own mind, *What think ye of Christ?*

It was with this view, you may remember, that the several testimonies have been proposed for your consideration, in order that you might, in a free and unbiaſſed

* 2 Tim, i, 12.

manner, draw such conclusions from them, as after mature deliberation, and devout prayer to God, should appear to you to be right and proper. Sensible of the weighty nature of the subject, it became a matter of conscience with me from the first, to be extremely cautious, in advancing any thing in proof, but upon the most undeniable testimony. And as there appeared to be but one method, by which this could be done, I have adopted it (hoping to prevent the possibility of delusion,) by making the holy Scriptures the only standard of decision. If, however, I have in any point, unknowingly departed from this rule, or, if I have considered any of the sacred writers in a different sense from what they themselves intended; you will but behold in me a new instance of that very fallibility I have studied to avoid; and from this additional proof of human weakness, or prejudice, and in the very exertion, of what I may venture to name, the sincerest and best intention, you will the more sensibly be convinced of the propriety of what I have

have suggested, that, on subjects of this serious nature, there should be no compulsion; but *let every man be fully persuaded* (as the Apostle speaks) *in his own mind**.

Convinced, indeed, after all, from every observation of human nature, how apt the wisest are to err, when left to the mere direction of their own minds, and that all our knowledge (more especially religious knowledge) must be derived from the teachings of the divine Spirit, (because, that *no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost* † :) I called upon you at our entrance upon the subject, to bend with me, before the awful throne of God, and implore light, and direction from heaven, to precede our path, that the *Spirit of truth might guide us into all truth*. And having now finished our researches, under an humble dependance on the divine aid, I must earnestly again request you, to join with me in prayer, that our conclusions may be under the same gra-

* Rom. xiv. 5.

† Corinth xii. 3.

cious direction: *that in every thing being enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge, the testimony of Jesus may be confirmed in us, so that we come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*.*.

■ The intention of the present discourse is to take a brief survey of the several arguments, which have been illustrated in a more copious manner, and by concentrating the whole evidence arising from thence, to shew the divinity of Jesus, in a more distinct and luminous point of view: It is on this account, I, therefore, once more, request your attention to the subject.

You will recollect, that the only object proposed from these Sermons, was an impartial and candid enquiry concerning the *person and character* of Jesus Christ. Whether he is to be classed among the frail and peccable race of men (as some professors of the Gospel have supposed,) or whether he is to be regarded, in that sacred and

* 1 Corinthians i. 5, 6, 7.

exalted light (in which the established church of this country hath invariably considered him,) *as the eternal Son of God.*

In the investigation of this interesting question, my endeavours were first directed to shew, that, from the appellation by which our blessed Lord is every where distinguished in the New Testament, as *the Son of God*, there arose a strong presumptive evidence that his nature must be *divine*. For, when we find such a peculiar name uniformly marking his person; applied to him at the first by the *angel*, which predicted his miraculous incarnation; afterwards confirmed by a *supernatural voice* from heaven, both at his *baptism*, and at his *transfiguration*; assumed by *Jesus himself*, and particularly at a season the most critical, when it was made the pretence for his condemnation; that even *spirits of darkness* gave their testimony, however reluctantly, to the truth of it: and that this was the very *name* by which *Christ* was always known to his followers: It is hardly possible to conceive such a concurrence
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of circumstances in confirmation of our Lord's pretensions to this character, and yet that it should be a mere barren title without meaning. To a mind perfectly free from prejudice (as I then observed,) the repeated and multifarious testimonies, which so fully and unequivocally distinguish our Lord by this term, must as decidedly prove his divinity. For the phrase cannot, upon any ground, be applicable to him, but upon the clear assurance that he possessed an eternal existence from his Father underived from creation, by which he becomes truly and properly the *Son of God* *.

But as the mere name, unconnected with power, carries with it but the smallest degree of evidence to the divinity of Jesus, I considered the argument arising from hence, but in a collateral point of view, and therefore passed on to circumstances more positive and substantial. In doing which, I desired you to regard the great criteria of

* Sermon I.

our Lord's divine nature, in the events which preceded his incarnation. The sacred writers have left upon everlasting record such accounts of Christ, and have ascribed to him such powers and operations, as when proved, cannot but impress the mind with the fullest conviction of his supreme dignity, in whom those perfections are found.

In examining the testimonies of this kind, I then entered upon the proofs which we have in Scripture, of our Lord's pre-existence, as the first circumstance which, in point of order, claimed our attention. And both from the words of Christ himself, as well as from the assurances of his Apostles, I endeavoured to shew you, that no one fact can be more strongly attested, nor any truth more clearly proved, than that Christ had a state of existence antecedent to his incarnation.

The fact, however, of this superiority of nature, distinguishable in the person of Jesus, being supported by events still more palpable; the next observation to which
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our views were naturally directed, led us to consider Christ under those illustrious characters, which loudly proclaim his dignity; I mean as the *Creator* and *Preserver* of the universe. And as the clear conviction of this great truth became so highly important in the argument, I went very largely into this part of the subject, in gathering the evidences as they arise from Scripture, and brought before you the most unanswerable testimonies in proof of it. Such views of Christ being apparently conclusive in determining the certainty of his Deity, a question involuntarily arises in the mind, how it is possible to resist such evidences? And, surely, unless such evidences could wholly, or in a great measure be refuted, there cannot be conceived any thing more daring than that of passing by all those testimonies of Scripture, dethroning the Son of God, and bringing him down to the level of a poor, peccable creature like ourselves! There should be, doubtless, some better ground to go upon, than merely the airy conjectures, and presumptuous reasonings, of the human mind.

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When I brought these proofs of Christ's divinity before you, I desired you seriously to ponder the cogency of these solemn considerations. Whether any man can really suppose, that the meek and unassuming temper of Jesus would have assumed divine honours, have declared his possession of *glory with his Father before the world*, with other intimations of a similar nature, unless his claims were rightly founded? Or, whether it is likely, that the servants of such a master should have been so forward in ascribing to him the incommunicable properties of the great Supreme, unless they had been most fully assured of the truth of what they asserted*?

Having proceeded thus far in the subject, in producing such proofs of our Lord's exalted character, as clearly justified the belief of his being more than human; I anticipated, and endeavoured to answer a question which appeared very likely to arise from hence; whether there are not disco-

* Sermon II.

verable, some traces, or appearances of Christ corresponding to these accounts, in the earlier ages of the world, and before his incarnation? For, though the facts which give belief to his divinity, cannot be strengthened by any considerations of this kind, (supposing the evidences themselves undeniable) yet, if there can be discovered in the *Old* Testament, any thing which shews a connection with the account given of him in the *New*, it will serve, no doubt, to illustrate the point more fully, and altogether confirm our faith in the divinity of Jesus.

Under this idea, I requested you to examine with me the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in order to learn what account we derive from thence, concerning the person of our Lord. Though the subject, no doubt, is highly intricate, and enveloped in much mystery; yet, I trust, the reasons adduced, were strong and satisfactory, to shew that there is great probability, that all the relations we meet with in these early ages of the world, of the appearance of a
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personal Jehovah, might, without violence to the sacred text, be considered as applicable to Jesus Christ. That every dispensation of the supreme Father, respecting mankind, has been uniformly carried on in the person of his blessed Son. That *he* is our *Creator*, our *Preserver*, our *Redeemer*, and finally will be our *Judge*. It will not be necessary for me to go over every evidence I then brought forward, to substantiate this opinion, in order to awaken your remembrance. It will, I hope, answer every purpose to observe, that the circumstances I referred to, were of such a nature and tendency, as made it difficult to account for on a contrary persuasion.

Having discussed this difficult point, in the best manner I was able, I left it to your own reflections, to make what inference you should think proper, and to determine, whether a correspondence of circumstances so very striking (and strengthened at the same time, by the previous view we had taken of our Lord's greatness of character, considered as the *Creator* and *Preserver* of the

Y 2 universe)

universe) did not very nearly amount to a certainty that Christ personally appeared in the world before his incarnation; and that all the dispensations of the supreme Father, respecting mankind, hath been conducted in the person of his divine Son *.

In our further pursuit of evidences, concerning the divinity of Jesus, it became a very natural and pertinent enquiry, to examine in the next place, what testimony or account the *prophets* have given of this illustrious character. If those *holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost* †, and professedly predicted the future events of the Messiah's kingdom, it certainly is an object highly expedient to our purpose, to know what they had declared of him. The inspiration, under which they penned their prophetic writings, must have preserved them from error; and the intention for which they wrote, makes it but reasonable to suppose, that in their accounts of the promised Messiah,

* Sermon III.

† 2 Peter i. 21.

they

they would sketch some of the more prominent features, at least, of his person and character.

With a view to the discovery of what those holy men had delivered, concerning Israel's Saviour, I again led your thoughts to the records of the Old Testament; and in order to investigate, as accurately as possible, the important question, I brought in review the predictions of all the prophets, which had written on the subject before you; I mean as far as related to our purpose. For, as we were not seeking information concerning the *general* character of the Messiah, nor even the *particular* marks by which Jesus Christ proved himself to be the very person, I did not consider it needful to enumerate *all* the passages in the writings of the prophets, which had reference to the promised Saviour. The object of our enquiry was directed to a single point; namely, under what *character* was this Messiah to appear? Whether he was expected as a *divine being*, as

mere *man*, or in a mysterious union of *both*?

In my endeavours to explore this point, agreeable to the plain and unperverted sense of the prophetic writings, I made many quotations from them, and the result was fairly and impartially stated. From the concurrent testimony of those venerable witnesses, it appeared evident that the great Deliverer of Israel, whom they predicted, was to come in the mysterious union of a great but humble Saviour; possessing *divine* attributes, by virtue of his *eternal* generation, and at the same time, by means of an *human* nature, endowed with all the distinguishing properties of *manhood*. This was the character under which we found the prophets depicted the blessed Redeemer of the world *. And with this information we entered upon that æra of the Gospel, when Jesus Christ made his appearance in the flesh.

The events which signalized the life of

* Sermon IV,

Jesus was, in a very copious and extensive manner, made the subject of our next examination. From the moment of his miraculous birth, to his departure into heaven, in the view of his astonished disciples, you beheld how every incident tended to illustrate and confirm the truth of prophecy; that while Christ appeared open to the full impressions of *humanity*, in all its various departments, he manifested no less every evidence possible, to prove his *divine nature*.

I endeavoured to conduct you through the several interesting particulars of this history of Jesus (at least such as had a more immediate reference to the great object of our enquiry;) and I hope that the effect which such views cannot but awaken in every true believer, is still strongly impressed upon your minds. Among these, I particularly recommended to your notice, the evidences of our Lord's miraculous incarnation. And this being so very important an event in itself, and so satisfactory in proof of the subject we are upon, I

dwelt the more largely upon it; and by adducing the several corroborating testimonies which confirm the fact; the prediction of *prophecy*, the information of the *angel*, the account of the sacred *historian*, and attested by the wonderful *events* which followed in the Redeemer's life; it should appear that no one circumstance can be more strongly certified and assured.

From the certain conviction of the wonderful birth of Jesus, I next proceeded to the evidences, equally demonstrable of the divine nature which appeared in his life. And first, of that astonishing series of *miracles* which he wrought. But as I then remarked to you, (and which I again particularly request may be duly observed), it is not the miracles of Jesus, simply considered in themselves, which proclaim his divinity; but it is the *manner*, the *personal authority*, by which they were performed, the *forgiveness of sins*, which sometimes accompanied them, and above all, the *ability Christ imparted to his disciples*, of the same operations with himself; it is from these the inference

ference of a superior, and divine being, must be unavoidable. The evident line of distinction drawn between Jesus, and all other workers of miracles, is such, as one should expect to find between the actions of a *Lord*, and those of his *servants*. They wrought miracles to prove in whose authority they acted, *Jesus* to manifest his own*.

From the review of the *miracles* of our Lord, considered as testimonies of his divinity, my next proof of this doctrine was taken from the *unparelled discourses* of Christ, which certainly carry with them a peculiar evidence to the same amount. In delivering his precepts to mankind, he taught, (as was justly observed of him), as *one that had authority, and not as did the Scribes*†. The sublime topics of his religion; the awful purpose which he declared to be the great end of his coming; the language he assumed; the assurance he gave of raising the dead at the last day; the power he possessed, and said he would ex-

* Sermon V.

† Matthew vii. 29.

ert of *drawing all men unto him**; in a word, the divine wisdom with which he taught, and the divine energy which accompanied his whole conversation; all highly demonstrate the unequalled excellence of our Lord's discourses, and utterly exclude the faintest gleam of comparison, between him, and every other teacher. They prove indeed, that *never man spake as this man*.

Proceeding in this methodical manner of examining the Scripture-testimonies for the divinity of Jesus, my next step was, if possible, advancing yet higher in proof of it, in bringing the evidences, which declare him to have possessed all the *attributes*, and *titles*, and *perfections* of the Godhead. Every property peculiar to the divine nature, and as such come within the apprehension of mankind, you may recollect, was either very clearly to be distinguished in the person of our Lord, or ascribed to him by the sacred writers. To recapitulate those evidences, which have been already so amply stated,

* John xii. 32.

would

would be both superfluous, and unnecessary. Let it suffice to say, that there is not an *attribute* or *name*, by which the incommunicable character of the great Jehovah is known in Scripture, but what we find equally applied to our blessed Lord; thereby explaining the sense of Christ's own words, when he said, *All things that the Father hath are mine* *. And surely it is highly incredible, that all the inspired writers, should have thus concurred in describing the person of Jesus, under the terms, by which the great Sovereign of the universe is known to his creatures, but upon the most absolute conviction, that the facts are precisely as they have stated them.

The order which I observed, in my arrangement of the evidences for Christ's divinity, led me next to mention *one* which I thought strongly tended to illustrate and prove the object in view: I mean the consideration of Jesus, in that peculiar light,

* John xvi. 15.

which

which His religion represents him, as *the great sacrifice and oblation for sin*. This cannot but imply a superiority in his nature equal to the object intended.

The miraculous incarnation of our Lord plainly intimated some important purpose, which could not be effected by a being merely human. And when we discover this purpose, as declared both by Christ and his Apostles, was *to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; and behold the awful attestations which attended his last moments, all proclaiming that some grand design was wrought by his death, we cannot but feel an additional evidence arising from hence, of the divinity of his nature.

I trespass, I fear, in this recapitulation of the principal points in the several arguments which have been already noticed, but it is by this means only that they can be concentrated into one view. I shall be more brief, however, in the abstract of what remains. I would beg your recollection only to the conclusive scenes of our Lord's ministry upon earth; his *resurrection,*

tion, his final commission to his disciples, his triumphal ascension into heaven, and his promised return as the supreme Judge of quick and dead, at the last day: such views of our Lord define a dignity in his character infinitely surpassing every idea of a being merely human. It is totally impossible to keep alive in our remembrance the persuasion of the simple humanity of Jesus, while we contemplate events of this superlative nature.

To behold him dismissing his few followers, and they of the lowest and most ignorant of the people, to the conversion of a world; assuring them of his constant presence and protection; breathing on them, and imparting the influence of the Holy Ghost: giving them power over unclean spirits, and for the working of all kinds of miracles: and having in a solemn and authoritative manner, poured his benediction upon them; to see him carried up into heaven, in the presence of his disciples; if such circumstances can be accounted for on common principles, or can be supposed possible,

possible, consistent with the nature of a mere *man* ; then ought they not to be regarded as evidences of any thing *superior* in our blessed Lord : but if they are absolutely unparalleled, and altogether incompatible, but upon the presumption of divinity, I cannot perceive how the inference which necessarily results from them shall be avoided, viz. that Jesus is *the Son of God*.

And when we take into the account the great scene which is to close our Lord's ministry, in the supreme office he will exercise, at the last day, as the Judge of men : when he is to come, *attended with an innumerable train of angels*, and in a *state of glory*, surpassing all conception : at whose coming, *all that are in their graves*, shall hear *his* voice and before *whose* presence, *heaven and earth shall flee away* : I have no idea how the sacred writers could have described to mankind the appearance of Jehovah, in a manner more completely sublime and magnificent ! But surely, such accounts can never correspond with the
notion

notion that all this refers but to the coming of an *human* being! Is it likely that the *grave* should give up his dead, at the voice of a man? that *angels* should attend his train, and even *heaven and earth pass away at his presence*? Nay more, that a mere glorified man, should be appointed to be the supreme arbiter of the everlasting fate of millions: or that he should be qualified for such an office as to read the heart, and know the exact motive of every single action; to ascertain real from unintentional guilt, and to determine, with perfect justice, the several portions of reward, or punishment, due to every individual? Besides (as I remarked to you) what reason can be found for the elevation of a man to a station so astonishingly great, and without all parallel? Whereas upon the supposition of our Lord's divine nature, every difficulty vanishes, and the whole dispensation of the Gospel, relating to the person and character of its blessed Author is probable, just, and uniform; and what our pure and uncorrupt notions of things would have conceived

ceived. He who made the world, and by whose power it is preserved, assumes a body of flesh to redeem it; and having, by this mysterious process, accomplished the purpose intended, he returns to his original state of glory, until he comes at the last day to judgment. Thus all the executive parts of the divine government are begun and carried on, and will be completed, by *him*, who is the same *yesterday, to-day, and for ever* *.

Having thus reviewed, in the relation of Scripture, and the events of our Saviour's life, the various testimonies to his divinity, I then closed the examination of evidences, in endeavouring to ascertain what was the opinion of the artless and undesigning servants of Christ, his Apostles, upon the subject; and when their sentiments, are added to the general account, I trust the whole taken together, will be found forming a body of evidence little short of demonstration. "With so solid and impregnable a chain of proofs (to use the lan-

* Sermon VI.

guage of a sensible writer*) is this great doctrine of the Christian church bound up and fortified †."

I have now, in as regular and progressive an order as the nature of the subject would admit, gone over the evidences of Scripture concerning the divinity of Jesus: and I have endeavoured to perform this duty in the plainest and most impartial manner possible; not by a long train of arguments addressed to men of science only, but in a form of words adapted to every comprehension, that, like the Prophet's vision, *be which runs may read* ‡. Whether I have been sufficiently successful in the proofs adduced, to satisfy every candid mind, I know not; yet I venture to believe some light hath been thrown upon the subject to guide the serious in their enquiry after the truth, respecting this great article of faith.

You have seen that the testimonies in favour of this opinion are strong and numerous, and such as do not depend upon one

* West on the Resurrection, page 294.

† Sermon VII.

‡ Habak, ii. 2.

or two passages in the word of God, of a doubtful meaning, expressed in parable or figure, but of the clearest construction, and in terms liable to no ambiguity. It is incredible therefore to suppose, that so many and various circumstances should concur to induce the belief of a doctrine, which is altogether unauthorized and ill-founded ! If this faith was derived from an oblique intimation, cursorily spoken of by any of the sacred writers, and at a time when the merit of the great Redeemer's character was the topic of discourse; if it depended upon the opinion of a single Apostle, or if it were noticed but in one part of Scripture ; or if the thing itself was totally repugnant to all reason and common sense : in either of these cases there might be some plausibility of argument for refusing, or at least suspending, our opinion upon a matter of this consequence ; and we should be justified in demanding some higher proofs, before we subscribed to this creed of the church. But when we behold the thing itself, connected by a chain of testimony, running through
the

the whole volume of Scripture; and such perfections, and attributes, and characters, as are utterly incompatible, but with divinity, possessed by our blessed Lord, and without all scruple applied to him by every one of the inspired writers: when proofs of this kind all concentrate in the person of Jesus, to certify his divine nature; ought it not to be some mighty argument to counterbalance such powerful evidences, and not a few detached phrases of Scripture delivered in a desultory way, and such, perhaps, as if properly considered and explained, with reference to the *occasion*, the *time*, the *place*, or *persons* to whom they were addressed, would be found not unfavourable to the doctrine.

But you are to determine for yourselves what degree of respect is due to the evidences which you have now reviewed. And let me hope that this determination will not be made from the hasty impulse of the moment, but rather be the serious result of a proper deliberation, and devout waiting in prayer upon the Almighty. *I speak as*

to wise men, judge ye what I say *. Remember, it is not a mere point of speculation, or curiosity, which reacheth no farther than the opinion, but it is an object which includes in its consequences all the great hopes of human nature. I have already more than once observed, and now finally wish to leave the full force of the observation upon your minds, that, together with the divinity of our blessed Master, must stand or fall, all the peculiar and momentous doctrines of his Gospel. Every thing interesting in Christianity is founded on the greatness of the Author's character. Even the *moral* precepts of his religion lose much of their dignity, and their authority is debased, if the founder be no more than man. Nor hath the New Testament any thing higher to recommend it, except in novelty, than the legation of Moses.

If this be the real state of things, and the Christian's Lord be not divine, farewell to all the hopes of the faithful, his conso-

* 1 Corinthians x. 15.

lations are no more ! Then all the gracious promises of religion, so highly encouraging to repentance, and amendment of life, and with which the anxious mind, when smitten with a sense of guilt, sought a requiem, are done away, and the law of God, strict and unalterable in its demands, stands forth before the guilty conscience, arrayed in all its terrors. To what refuge shall the awakened sinner now fly, or in what sacrifice can he again place confidence ? I thought (he will say) my soul secure in the expectation of pardon to my sins, through the meritorious death of my blessed Saviour, upon the terms of faith, repentance, and newness of life. I understood that the Apostles of Christ had instructed the world in this doctrine, that God hath set forth the Redeemer as *a propitiation* : and that the *Son of God himself* had declared, that *he came to give his life a ransom for many* * : but if this be all a delusion, I am robbed of my best comforts, and am without hope.

* Matthew xx. 28.

Tell me not of the virtues of human nature; for, how shall any man build his hopes of acceptance with his Maker, upon the sandy foundation of the purity of his own life! Alas! my very best deeds are largely tinged with a mixture of infirmity. I see a mark of imperfection strongly appearing in every page of my life. And for the errors and intentional sins of nature, *should the Lord be extreme to mark all that is done amiss, who may abide it *?* And how then *by the deeds of the law shall any flesh be justified †?*

And what is repentance? a patched up, blemished, and imperfect repentance, made up of alternate sorrow and sin. To-day, feeling the compunction of guilt; to-morrow falling again perhaps into the same or similar transgressions: the next day renewing the serious impression, and soon after giving fresh proofs of human infirmity: and thus going on through life in the succession of offences and contrition; some-

* Psalm cxxx. 3.

† Rom. iii. 20.

times humbling the soul under the mighty hand of God, from a conscious unworthiness, but more frequently forgetting that *there is a God which judgeth the earth*. Are these sacrifices to offer the Lord? Are these fragments of a chequered life sufficiently meritorious to save the soul? Can any man be presumptuous enough to satisfy his mind that heaven *must be the natural reward* to such a train of conduct?

Considering the miserable consequence to which the rejection of our Lord's divine nature necessarily leads, and the despondency it creates in the human mind; one should imagine that the advocates for this doctrine, however secretly convinced that they are *right*, must yet wish to be *wrong*. For, surely, it is the most comfortless doctrine ever proposed to mankind! To consider ourselves in a fallen, helpless state of being, exposed, to various dangers, and surrounded with the numerous temptations which beset the path of duty: and in this situation to have no divine spirit to look up to, as the helper of our infirmities, nor any

divine Redeemer to confide in, as the propitiation of our sins; conscious also, of being accountable creatures, and that a day is approaching, when all our actions will be brought into judgment, with every secret thought, whether it be good or bad: can there be a more discouraging and comfortless religion than this? And especially when the retrospect of life is clouded over, I do not say barely with frailties, but with *wilful* offences. To have no better support than repentance, and no refuge but what arises from the unbounded mercy of God: ignorant at the same time, whether *that* repentance hath been exercised in due proportion to our sins, or whether that *mercy* will be extended equal to our necessities. However hopes of this kind may sooth the mind with the speciousness of their promises, when that mind is perfectly at ease, and the awful objects of futurity are considered as at a distance; yet, when a man is just closing the book of life, and hovering between this world and the next, then it is to be apprehended, mere abstract arguments will

will entirely lose their efficacy. And indeed, if experience can be deemed the truest test for the ascertaining a matter of fact, we have reason to conclude, that *those* leave the world with most complacency and satisfaction, who have learned to place their hopes and confidence in a *Saviour's merit*, and not in *their own*.

But it may be said, that we are not to judge of a doctrine by its consequences, as they may appear to us. Truth must ultimately prevail, and our duty is, to anticipate her decisions. Be this, then, the great object of pursuit. Examine with all possible care and circumspection, the testimonies for the divinity of Jesus, which have been now proposed to your consideration; and be guided in your opinion, as you would upon any other important concern of life. Where the evidences are most palpable and convincing, there let the decision of the point rest. Ask your own heart, whether it be possible to imagine, that such an accumulation of proofs as you have
now

now seen, uniting in testimony to this great truth, should conspire in support of any cause, unless the probability was in its favour? And do not wonder, that this great object of faith is not entirely free from every difficulty: rather wonder that in so mysterious a dispensation, as the recovery of a lost world, and by means so astonishing, matters should be as much understood by us as they really are. That such a creature as man, who is but just crept into being, should be able to look round about him, and behold even the surface of the *deep things of God*.

But whatever your conclusions may be, may divine grace confirm, and strengthen the faith of all who are in the *right*, and mercifully bring into the way of truth every one who is *wrong*. The hour is hastening fast upon us, when we shall be exercised no more with the mysteries of religion, nor will the blessed Redeemer of the world be any longer the object of our faith, but *we shall see him as he is, and know*

know even as we are known. God grant, that in that awful hour, our faith in his sight may not be reprov'd; but that it may then appear, we have given, during the present day of trial, an earnestness of attention to the great demands of duty suitable to their importance, and have diligently set our hearts to a serious concern for the *one thing needful*. And oh! that God may daily assist every humble soul, that does this more and more, with his grace. And *may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Jesus Christ* *.

But for *you*, who live in the faith of this persuasion (and I trust I speak to numbers of that description,) I must not dismiss the consideration of this important subject, without observing, in what a serious and awful manner the perfect conviction of this great truth ought to affect our hearts. Satisfied as we are, by a series of proofs, the most full and incontestible, that the

* 1 Thess. iii. 5.

gracious scheme of salvation contained in the Gospel was proposed to mankind by no less a being than the *Son of God himself*; think, I beseech you, with what increased veneration and regard, *we*, above all men, ought to receive this *glorious gospel of the blessed God* *. Is then the great Author of our religion really and truly the Son of God? Did he possess *glory with his Father before the world*? And was there no other method in all the plans of Omnipotence, for the recovery of our fallen nature, but for this divine character to come down from heaven, to enshrine his glory in a veil of flesh, and by a process the most painful and humiliating, to procure the means of our salvation and happiness? Was there no less being, no archangel, equal to the accomplishment of it? Dread Lord! what awful and awakening views ought it to excite in our minds, of the importance of that scheme of grace and mercy, which he brought, and with what ardor, should

* I Timothy i. 11.

our endeavours be exerted to co-operate with him in working out our salvation! Surely, the higher ideas we entertain of the great Author of our faith, the higher must arise in proportion, the duty and obedience we owe him. Let those professors of Christianity, who consider *Jesus* but as a *man*, regard, but as the ministry of a *man*, all the interesting doctrines of his religion. For the whole of his Gospel, being enervated by this persuasion, they cannot, they ought not, indeed, to feel it in the manner it should affect us. But *we*, who, in the person of *Jesus*, behold the eternal Son of the Father, in this consideration, how exceedingly enforced upon the conscience, are all the sanctions of the divine laws! Let it not, therefore, for shame, be ever said, that either in affection, or in duty, *their* conduct is equal to *ours*; but let us shew the superiority of our faith, by a corresponding practice; and let the remembrance of that just and awakening consideration of the Apostle's be never from our hearts, how *impossible it will be in the end,*
for

for any of us to escape, if we neglect so great salvation.

Particularly, let the awful view of the sad nature of guilt, be one of those principles most deeply impressed upon the mind, in the consciousness of the divinity of the great Author of our religion.

Never was there afforded an event equally demonstrable of the dreadful malignity of sin, as when Christ became man, to redeem the world from its influence. The promulgation of the law on Mount Sinai, though accompanied with all the manifestations of the divine presence, was by no means so strong an indication of the value of righteousness in the sight of God, as when his divine Son appeared in an human form, to proclaim it to the world. And of all arguments which can be thought of, to interest the human heart to resist the contagion of sin, and to stimulate to purity of life and manners, no doubt that is infinitely transcendent, which is drawn from the incarnation, and sufferings, and death of Jesus.

Let

Let the solemn conviction, then, of the great malignity of sin be always connected in our remembrance, with the assurance of *his* divine nature, who came to expiate its effects: and if *God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* *; if *no evil can possibly dwell with him* †; if he hath given so decided a proof of his utter detestation of sin, as even to send his Son to be the Saviour of the world ‡: What shall I say? If the redemption of sinners could only be effected by means so awful and extraordinary; *shall we dare to continue in sin*, after such a manifestation of the divine displeasure against it? *Shall we, who are supposed by virtue of the death of Jesus, to be ourselves dead unto sin, live any longer therein* §: God forbid. *We are now bought with a price, and are no longer our own*: and therefore we are charged with a peculiar commission to holiness, and to glorify God in our body, and in our spirit, which are God's ||. In a word, we who receive the doctrine of a *divine Being* in our

* Habak. i. 13. † Psalms v. 4. ‡ 1 John iv. 14.

§ Romans vi. 12. || 1 Corinth. vi. 20.

Redeemer, are justly expected, above all others, *to be examples of believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and purity* *.

And these duties, let us further remember, are enforced upon us by considerations, if possible, yet more importunate. Every additional proof of God's love must proportionably increase the apprehensions of his anger. Every abused mercy is converted into an evil. And what is intended for our happiness, by a misapplication or neglect, must become the source of misery. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries* †. How ought our souls to be impressed with the conviction of these undoubted truths! For, depend upon it, of all condemnation which may fall upon the sinner at the last day, that Christian's must be the heaviest and

* I Tim. iv. 12.

† Heb. x. 26, 27.

most intolerable, who, with the open profession and belief of the divinity of Jesus, hath lived a wicked and disobedient life. *Far better would it have been never to have known the way of righteousness, than after having known to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us *.* And if the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear †?

One observation more shall finish all I have to offer upon this subject, and the reference it has to a most important article in the scale of duty, will justify my mentioning it.

I need not tell you, that a principal feature in the religion of Jesus, and by which his followers are particularly to be known, is *charity*. That *charity* or *love* which the Apostle Paul hath defined, as *fulfilling the whole law*. And, if my apprehension of things be true, there is no one motive in the whole Gospel, which enforces this duty, with equal emphasis upon the mind, as

* 2 Peter ii. 21.

† 1 Peter iv. 18.

the consideration of that love, which is manifested in the doctrine of the *incarnation*. It was the contemplation of this stupendous instance of divine love, which made the Apostle John break forth in that kind of rapture; *Behold ! what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us* *. And the inference he draws from it is the most just and natural, and corresponds to our Lord's own precept ; *if God so loved us, how ought we to love one another* †.

The Christian who contemplates the love of God, in this extensive light, ought to be super-eminent in its imitation, when compared with all other professors of the Gospel, in proportion as his conception of the great Author of his salvation is more exalted than theirs. And in no instance, perhaps, does a more ample field open before us, for the exercise of this benignity of temper, than upon subjects of religious dispute.

* 1 John iii. 1.

† 1 John iv. 11.

Important as the topic we have been considering appears to us, and most essential as it should seem to every man as an article of faith; yet let none of us presumptuously prescribe limits to the divine mercy, nor rashly conclude, that every one who cannot receive the belief of it with equal conviction with ourselves, will necessarily be excluded from eternal happiness: God forbid, that the terms of salvation should be within such very narrow bounds!

Have we not encouragement to hope, from various parts of Scripture, that many a virtuous and conscientious *heathen*, who never heard of the name of Jesus, but yet lives up to the best of his endeavours, agreeable to the light of nature, and the information God has been pleased to give him, will be included in the Christian covenant, and through the atoning merit of our divine Lord, be among the redeemed at the last day? Shall not that Almighty God, *who keepeth mercy for thousands* *, *the great Judge of all the earth, do right* †?

* Exodus xxxiv. 7.

† Gen. xviii. 25.

And is it not possible, also, that the *Christian*, who hath both heard, and venerates the name of Jesus, and endeavours to observe the strictest obedience to the moral parts of the Gospel, may *be* not be ransomed from the guilt of his nature, by the blood of Christ, and sanctified by the influences of the Holy Spirit, although he believes not the importance of the one, and is unconscious of the operations of the other? Are the bounties of divine mercy restricted, to our proper conception of them, and shall their merit and efficacy be lost, if we comprehend them not, in their full extent? Would not this be, in a great measure, to check the operations of Omnipotence by human powers, and altogether suspend the blessings of God, upon the will of man?

We cannot possibly know what causes there may be to hinder the same truth from affecting alike the mind universally. What, from constitutional temper, from early prepossession, the effects of ignorance, of education, unavoidable prejudice in some, and

and the want of information in others; it is impossible for any to ascertain the precise degree of error, which constitutes wilful, or unintentional unbelief. And yet it is very evident, that while the former deserves the severest reprehension, the latter calls for pity and compassion. And shall we then, with the scanty knowledge which we possess, presume to determine where the error lies? Shall *we* erect a tribunal, and place ourselves in the forbidden chair, and pronounce the definitive sentence of condemnation; and this also upon so grand a subject as the eternal salvation of souls? Let us leave points of this awful nature to *Him*, who alone is competent to judge them. *He* knows the human heart, and knows both its weakness and perversity; and therefore can clearly ascertain between wilful blindness, and a defect of vision. And however we may feel (as indeed we cannot but feel) a most anxious apprehension and concern, for the final condition of that *Christian brother*, who, possessing the

same evidences with ourselves, of the divinity of our blessed Master, yet disbelieves and rejects them, and endeavours to make the sacred and venerable doctrine of Scripture, bend to the judgment of philosophical decision; yet when we see, among this class of unbelievers, serious persons *professing godliness*, lamenting the errors of their lives, exercising continual repentance, and dying daily to the world: as charity leads us to conclude that every man of this description is equally satisfied in his own mind with ourselves, of the truth of his creed, and equally anxious to recommend himself to the mercy of the Great Searcher of hearts, shall not that Almighty Lord, our most merciful Saviour, *who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way* *, pardon and blot out the unintentional errors of every humble and sincere mind? We must hope this, for charity enforces the duty. And though we may, as far as the sphere

* Hebrews v. 2.

of our usefulness can reach, adopt all the soft and engaging means of persuasion, with every Christian brother, who flights this great doctrine of the Gospel, and offer up our most ardent prayers, if *God peradventure will give him repentance to the acknowledging of the truth* * ; yet the ultimate consequence must be referred to the decision of infinite wisdom.

Indeed, who shall determine how far a diversity of opinion is necessary among the trials of the present state ! Perhaps the errors which occasionally spring up in the world, eventually prove sources of improvement to the faithful. By their means the truth is analyzed, and more fully discovered, and brought forward to the notice of mankind, with stronger conviction. In the mean time, it affords also, another admirable opportunity of producing good, in the exercise of that charity among the Lord's people, which is not only the highest

* 2 Timothy ii. 25.

ornament of our nature, but *the very bond of peace, and of all virtues*. Blessed Saviour ! how does thy divine and gentle Spirit continually rebuke the irascible temper of thy followers *. Gracious Lord ! make

* I hope no improper inference will be made from these arguments, as if the belief of our Lord's divinity was not so material an article in the faith of a Christian. I think no man of candour, after what hath been said, can possibly draw this conclusion. I conceive it to be, indeed, most highly important, and have endeavoured to preserve the idea, through the whole of these Discourses. But I am equally convinced, at the same time, that the great virtues of Christian love and charity, towards persons of a different way of thinking, ought by no means to be lessened upon this account. The *one* is a clear, and evident duty; the *other*, but an opinion. And the reasons I have stated, I flatter myself, are sufficiently cogent to stop all hasty judgment upon each other's conduct. Matters of this solemn nature, surely, should be left with Him, to whom they alone belong. For it ill becomes those, who, conscious of their own manifold imperfections, stand in need of so much forbearance, to recommend them to the mercies of God, through a gracious Redeemer, to set bounds to the divine favour with respect to others. Let our *faith* be as ardent as possible, but let our *charity* also remain unbroken.

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thy benevolent religion, produce at least, this effect in our hearts. Bring us to the imitation of thyself, in that part where thou art chiefly imitable, and beget in us *that meek and quiet spirit which in thy sight is of great price* *.

In the cultivation of this truly Christian temper, let us exert our noblest efforts; and let us humbly beseech Almighty God, that he will mercifully overlook those fences which we throw up, to form separate inclosures, for our religious duties, and through the merits of that precious blood, sufficient to the salvation of the whole world, that God may finally bring, by the various methods of his providence, and his grace, *those who know not, and those who feel not*, the want of its efficacy, as well as *all* who place their entire confidence and trust in it. Remember his own most gracious words: *Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, and they also I must bring,*

* 1 Peter iii. 4.

*and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd *.*

In the mean time, let no sincere believer in the divinity of his Lord, entertain the least apprehension, as though *that faith* is in any danger of being overthrown, *which was once delivered to the saints* †. That gracious providence, which watched over, and guarded it, while a tender plant, from every storm, will not suffer it now, (to use our Lord's own beautiful figure,) when it has waxed a great tree, and its branches have filled the earth, to be cut down and destroyed. By feeble instruments was it first planted, and under divine protection, the same humble means, will in all ages, be found sufficient for its security and support.

When the fashionable doctrine of the present hour has had its day, like many others which have sprung up, and for the moment appeared to flourish, but soon died

* John x. 16.

† Jude iii.

away,

away, *whose very memorial is perished with them* * ; this also, will sink and be forgotten. And, as the *false god* could not stand before the *ark of the Lord*, though repeatedly set in his place, but fell upon his face to the earth † ; so this, and all other deviations from the true faith, must ultimately bend to the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, the *Eternal Son* of the *Eternal Father*.

But O ! what topics of persuasion shall I adopt, so as to leave a lasting impression of these truths upon every mind, to be the perpetual incentive of all our conduct. I will say with the Apostle ; *But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life* § . And let the expectation of this *eternal life* excite our daily preparation for it. Let the employments of our *future state* be-

* Psalm ix. 6. † 1 Sam. v. 3, 4. § Jude 20, 21.

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come our principal subject of contemplation in the *present*. Let every hour be such, as we would wish our last to be. And when the scene of this life is drawing to its end, and the hand of death is closing our mortal eyes for ever, may the last faint accents, which tremble on our lips, be in unison with the beginning of our everlasting song. *Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God, for ever, and ever *.*
Amen.

* Revelations vii. 10. 12.



THE END.

